

# **Of Apes and Angels: Myth, Morality and Fundamentalism**

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**Abstract:**

All theories attempting to explain the rise of fundamentalism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries agree that fundamentalism is a problematic and threatening response to a problematic and threatening modernity. This contention can be supported, inasmuch as fundamentalists do indeed seem very much at home in a technological world. However, how much can be extrapolated from this familiarity is highly debatable. To this end, it is vital for any discussion of fundamentalism to first attempt to achieve a clear-eyed view of the modern world.

Such a view, at least that which is achievable, seems to suggest that the modern world is not, in fact, one of heretofore unimaginable horror. The recently uncovered scale of the genocide committed on the native peoples of the Caribbean and both hemispheres of the New World between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, demonstrates that genocide is not, in any sense, a product of modern ways of thought or even the industrialization of slaughter. Likewise, most of the examples used to prove the contention of a uniquely traumatic modernity, for example, the rise of racism or the Holocaust, are, when considered closely, far less novel and idiosyncratically modern than often considered.

Such a re-evaluation inevitably raises questions about culture, tradition, relativity, universalism, and not least morality, particularly the question of what morality is, where it comes from, and what if any role, does religion play in the formation of morals and ethics. This inevitably feeds back into the question of fundamentalism, most notably in the question of whether the fallen, sinful world against which fundamentalists so often proclaim themselves to be rebelling, is in fact, the world in which we live, or a Manichean world of their own imagining, invented to justify their rebellion.

### **Introduction:**

There is an old joke, which personally I can remember hearing in the late 1980's, about a tourist walking through the streets of Belfast during The Troubles, who is stopped by a gang of men in balaclavas carrying clubs.

"Are you a Catholic or a Protestant?" The leader of the gang asks.

"I'm an atheist," replies the terrified tourist.

"A Catholic atheist or a Protestant atheist?"

Although this grim bit of humour has been retold, reinterpreted, and rewritten almost constantly over the last 20 years, with BBC personality and academic Oliver McTernan going so far as to claim that this actually happened to a Danish journalist of his acquaintance.<sup>1</sup> The point of the story seems have got mislaid along the way. It is almost always presented, even by arch-atheist Richard Dawkins, as evidence that religious conflicts, are not as a rule, conflicts over religion. However, the true point of the anecdote, the reason it is funny, is precisely because it plays on the phenomenon which all know, but few understand, that religion is more than believing catechism and creeds. There is, in fact, a huge difference between being a Catholic atheist and a Protestant atheist and this difference might be so large as to render the atheism redundant. Human identities are complex and never operate solely on one level.

This is, in many ways, the base and basic problem with discussions of fundamentalism where the dominant conclusion is that the rise of fundamentalism is at once a mirror image of the rise of the modern world, and a result of a failure to be at home in said modern world. This interpretation at once conflates and obscures the irreducibly complex interplay of forces that go into being people. For example, terrorist actions against the west appear to be motivated far more by political grievances than by religion per se,<sup>2</sup> as found by the Gallup world poll of 35 predominantly Muslim countries which revealed the "high conflict group"<sup>3</sup> to be wealthier and better educated than the average, and motivated by quite real political

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<sup>1</sup> New York Public Library. "Sam Harris in Conversation with Oliver McTernan" @ <http://www.nyppl.org/research/calendar/imagesprog/samharris92506.pdf>, p.11.

<sup>2</sup> Gallup, Inc. "Who Are the Politically Radicalized in the Muslim World?" @ <http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/mwfi104599/Who-Politically-Radicalized-Muslim-World.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> That is to say, the 7% of those polled who considered the 9/11 attacks completely morally justified and held a very unfavorable opinion of the west.

grievances. However it is equally undeniable that political grievances are informed by identity, and to a large degree, identity is informed by religion. For example, the Gallop polling also found that the most common political grievance was:

... a deep sense of being treated as inferiors and being humiliated by the West. In fact, what they resent most is the West's "disrespect for Islam."<sup>4</sup>

To clarify, this is not to say that the analyses of the Gallop poll were in error, or that politics is not an over-arching factor, but rather to say that such distinction are massively problematic. To look for any single cause for a social movement, let alone as inherently complex and multi-faceted a movement as fundamentalism, is to purposely miscomprehend what it is to be human. Such explanations ignore the reality that all humans are subject to the strain of not always peacefully cohabitating with demands of dozens (if not hundreds) of mutually opposed and competing identities. To some degree, in fact, it might be said that being human is to be an amalgam of sorts, a child of a thousand parents, the product of culture, history, religion and geography, and the still largely mysterious question of what it is to be alive, let alone self-reflective.

The idea that these components, should or even can, be judged in isolation, or even without reference to the other components of identity, is to ignore the evidence that politics is personal or it is nothing, as demonstrated by the lock-step decline in western political participation, as political parties have moved ever closer to a sanitized centrism. The political realm will never, so long as politics involves people, be able to truly escape the demands of the personal. Likewise religion will never be truly disengaged, disentangled, or uncoupled from issues of context and culture, ethnicity or land, or from the role these notions play in informing identity, ideology, ontology or outlook. To some degree, it seems that the only way to disentangle these strands, is to take one thread and sanctify it at the expense of all the others.

Historically, the clearest example of this, in almost every religious tradition, has been the retreat into pietistic quietism or asceticism, which in this context could be viewed as a cognitive disengagement based on the privileging of piety over everything else. Ironically, if such a retreat is successful, it will often generate its own community, complete with its own complex interplay of wants and needs, which will often

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<sup>4</sup> Gallup, Inc. "Who Are the Politically Radicalized in the Muslim World?" @ <http://www.muslimwestfacts.com/mw/f/104599/Who-Politically-Radicalized-Muslim-World.aspx>

necessitate a re-entanglement with the outside world. One of the more notable examples of this is the case of the Hasidic community in Israel, which has been forced into politics in order to maintain the dispensation that exempts the Hasidic community from military service and to ensure the system of government stipends for large families and Yeshiva students.<sup>5</sup>

The fundamentalist response, in contrast, is to make no effort to disentangle these different threads, and to simply, indiscriminately and promiscuously sanctify all the different aspects of their identity into an undifferentiated mass of norms and values and preconceptions, and then declare their chauvinistic adherence to this consecrated concoction as proof of their own piety. Although this shall be discussed in far greater detail later, it is worth considering the words of then Texas governor, Miriam Ferguson, who, in justifying a bill to bar the teaching of foreign languages in Texas' public schools, observed that "If English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for us."<sup>6</sup>

Of course, most examples, by definition, are very context specific, and this very specificity has paradoxically lent the idea of fundamentalism an odd universality. Since similar fundamentalist movements have emerged in radically different contexts, the natural inference has been that they are all responding to the same stimuli, namely modernity. However, this universality produces its own problematic claims to specificity, as to a large degree, it simply presupposes that fundamentalism is a uniquely modern response to uniquely modern circumstances, rather than simply a form of militant piety which has been with us for at least as long as our monotheistic traditions. Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt, for example, writes in a passage representative not only of his view but of the general academic consensus, that:

Fundamentalist movements constitute one of the major social movements which developed in the framework of modern civilization and modernity. The ideologies promulgated by the fundamentalist movements constitute a party of the continually changing discourse of modernity, especially as it developed from the end of the nineteenth century onwards.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> United Torah Judaism. *jewishvirtuallibrary.org*, @ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/UTJ.html> see also Gershon Gorenberg. "Religious Zionists Feel Anger, Alienation As Israel's Political Map Shifts Leftward" @ <http://www.forward.com/articles/1346/>

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas D. Kristof. "God and Sex." *The New York Times*, October 23, 2004 @ <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/10/23/opinion/23kristof.html>

<sup>7</sup> Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: the Jacobin dimension of modernity*. p. 82.

However, even by his own account, this is somewhat ambiguous, as Eisenstadt notes religious movements with recognizable fundamentalist characteristics as early as the Axial Age. He insists on drawing a distinction between these movements and their modern offspring, dismissing the earlier incarnations as “proto-fundamentalists”, even though he is largely unable to articulate the difference, and ends up drawing the not altogether convincing conclusion that contrary to the proto-fundamentalist movements which “... promulgate a strong patriarchal, anti-feminist attitude which tends to segregate women and impose far-reaching restrictions on them ... the modern fundamentalist ... mobilize women – even if in segregation from men – into the public sphere ...”<sup>8</sup>

Eisenstadt concedes a problem with this thesis, admitting that “... one of the first acts of the new government installed by the Afghan group the Taliban ... was to force women from the public sphere, out of the schools and even out of work.”<sup>9</sup> Eisenstadt tries to argue that this “... evidences more proto-fundamentalist than modern fundamentalist ...” tendencies, and that as such, the Taliban are simply the last of the proto-fundamentalists.

Clearly, such classifications are deeply and obviously problematic. The most obvious problem is that even a quick glance at the world’s more fundamentalist movements, will reveal that modern fundamentalists have certainly not repudiated patriarchal or anti-feminist attitudes, and though they may mobilize women to political ends, this mobilization generally takes the form of making women the agents of their own oppression. Regard the *American Eagle Forum*, which proudly proclaims that it has “successfully led the ten-year battle to defeat the misnamed Equal Rights Amendment with its hidden agenda of tax-funded abortions and same-sex marriages...”<sup>10</sup> as well as the “... feminist goal of federally financed and regulated daycare.”<sup>11</sup> Or one can travel to Pakistan and witness the outcry by Islamists over the repeal of the Hudood Ordinance, a set of sharia-based laws which “... criminalize adultery and non-marital

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<sup>8</sup> Shmuel Noah Eisenstadt. *Fundamentalism, Sectarianism, and Revolution: the Jacobin dimension of modernity*. p. 96.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> The Eagle Forum. “Join Eagle Forum so you will have a voice at the U.S. Capitol and at State Capitols.” @ <http://www.eagleforum.org/misc/descript.html>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



sex, including rape ... and have led to thousands of women being imprisoned for so-called “honor” crimes.”<sup>12</sup> It is also worth noting that the choice to make political use of mobilized women may be more motivated by a pragmatic political necessity than by a change in the underlying thought-world.

However, to a large degree, such an argument is, at this point, unanswerable, as all our definitions of fundamentalism are either predicated on a relationship with modernity, or have been developed in explicit reference to modern fundamentalisms, which to a large degree, renders fundamentalism, by definition, as inapplicable to pre-modern forms of religiosity. While this may seem a somewhat petty complaint, it is ways demonstrative of a bigger problem, namely that to attempt to interrogate fundamentalism is, in many to attempt to understand the factors that make up another’s identity and context from within a largely inescapable tangle of our own prejudices, ideologies, ontology or outlooks. As such, the first question that must be asked, is how much can be verified of what we think we know about the world and its past and present.

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<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Pakistan: Proposed Reforms to Hudood Laws Fall Short.” @ <http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2006/09/05/pakistan-proposed-reforms-hudood-laws-fall-short>

## Chapter One: From Here to Modernity

One of the more immediate problems in any discussion or critique of the modern world, is the question of whether what is seen and counted as a traumatic feature of modernity, is in fact, a widespread and deeply-felt discomfort, or simply something the writer-educated, liberal and western happen to find troublesome. Karen Armstrong provides a curious example of this in her claim that while the modern world has empowered us, liberated us and opened up broad new horizons, and has enabled us to live healthier, happier lives:

Yet it has often dented our self-esteem ... Copernicus unseated us from the center of the universe, and relegated us to a peripheral role. Kant declared that we could never be certain that our ideas corresponded to any reality outside our own heads. Darwin suggested that we were simply animals, and Freud showed that far from being wholly rational creatures, human beings were at the mercy of the powerful, irrational forces of the unconscious, which could be accessed only with great difficulty.<sup>13</sup>

The imposition of these extremely difficult demands of modern culture, Armstrong argues, is the root cause of “fundamentalist fury.”<sup>14</sup> However, we can be almost certain that this is not so. Firstly, in February of 2009, a survey of Britons found that only 25% accept evolution as true, with another 25% willing to accept that evolution is “probably true”. Interestingly, only about half of the remaining 50%, who reject evolution, actually embrace creationism or intelligent design, with the rest “... often mixing evolution, intelligent design and creationism together.”<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, every similar survey finds comparable results. A 2005 Pew Survey of Americans found that 42% felt certain that life on earth had existed in its present form since the beginning of time, while 18% accepted evolution, but believed that it had been guided by a Supreme Being, leaving less than a quarter who actually fully accept the idea that our existence is due to fortune and impersonal forces.<sup>16</sup>

Nor, though it may disquieting to accept, does there seem to be any basis for assuming that the Copernican view of the cosmos enjoys any more wide support. As

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<sup>13</sup> Karen Armstrong. *The Battle For God*, pp 390-391.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p.390.

<sup>15</sup> Riazat Butt. “Half of Britons do not believe in evolution, survey finds”  
@<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/feb/01/evolution-darwin-survey-creationism>

<sup>16</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. “Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics” @  
<http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=153>

Carl Sagan – who, as the public face of NASA for nearly twenty years, took an interest in such things – noted in the mid-1990’s, every poll NASA commissioned on the subject showed that somewhere around 50% of American adults did not know that the Earth revolves around the sun. Sagan even stated that it was not uncommon to find smart kids in his undergraduate classes at Cornell University who did not know that the Sun is a star. Sagan further argues that since Americans are fed far more science fiction than most people, and still take pride in owning the world’s most advanced space program, they “... have much more exposure to the Copernican insight than does the average human ...”<sup>17</sup> and as such “... It may very well be, then, that more than four and a half centuries after Copernicus, most people on Earth still think that our planet sits immobile at the centre of the Universe, and that we are profoundly 'special'.”<sup>18</sup>

However, though Armstrong might be an unusually careless case in her determination to explain away the rise of fundamentalism as a curious outgrowth of modernity, she is entirely typical of the state of the current discourse. There are, of course, good and noble reasons to seek a connection between fundamentalism and modernity: to prove fundamentalism modern would, to some extent, strip it of its authenticity and claims to orthodoxy. Likewise, since the only two obvious variables are religion and modernity, the labeling of fundamentalism as a curiously modern creation avoids the very real possibility of the larger religious traditions being damned by association. Furthermore, if fundamentalism can be so revealed as a curious and novel innovation of the modern world, then we can safely assume that the problem is simply ‘the times’ rather than in the contents or forms of our beliefs. However, such contentions often do far more to obscure than illuminate the issues in question.

### ***The Solid Air Melts: Fundamentalism as modernism.***

One of the more obvious problems, for example, is just what is meant by modernity, and the troublesome fact that all definitions are either unhelpful or prejudicial. Take for example, Marshall Berman’s famous and oft repeated maxim<sup>19</sup> that:

To be modern ... is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom, to find one's world and oneself in perpetual disintegration and renewal, trouble and anguish, ambiguity and contradiction: to be part of a universe in which all that is solid melts

<sup>17</sup> Carl Sagan. *The Demon-Haunted World*. p. 304.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence. *Defenders of God*. p. 1-2.

into air. To be a modernist is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom, to make its rhythms one's own, to move within its currents in search of the forms of reality, of beauty, of freedom, of justice, that its fervid and perilous flow allows ...<sup>20</sup>

While this may be a near-perfect expressionistic description of the modern condition, it tells us next to nothing about just how one is supposed to “make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom ...” or even more to the point, how we are to identify one who refuses to be at home in said maelstrom. Bruce Lawrence, who claims that Berman's maxim provides a “... definitional framework that clarifies the difference ...”<sup>21</sup> seems unable to articulate the difference so revealed, instead presenting the conflict as between moderns who “... recognize a collective past that informs their individual present”, and modernists who “... see only a single thread tracing their particular instincts, needs and desires ... If moderns are conflicted universalists, modernists are unabashed relativists.”<sup>22</sup>

While this might be true, it can hardly be considered a clarifying distinction. Universalist claims, or at least claims to universal truth emerge so often and in so many different contexts, from the Islamic claim that there no God but God, to the medical claim that antibiotics kill bacteria but not viruses and that this fact is equally true everywhere, to the UN's claim that the “inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,”<sup>23</sup> that to treat such claims as being demonstrative of the same state of mind, or similar values or tastes, or as showing an equal investment in modernity, is ultimately to draw a false equivalence, which by coloring everything in the same way, makes actual distinctions impossible. As such, to argue that fundamentalism, being inherently universalist, is also inherently modern, is to render modernity as a category so bloated, promiscuously inclusive and un-tethered to any particular time, as to be a meaningless concept. Likewise, positing a rejection of modernist relativism as the essential and defining feature of the modern, is to run the risk of illuminating connections and parallels which are far more apparent than actual.

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<sup>20</sup> Marshall Berman. *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air, The Experience of Modernity*. (9th edition). pp. 345-346.

<sup>21</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence. *Defenders of God*. p. 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” @ <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

It is worth noting, that Lawrence's "modernists" were not the first to promote the idea that truth is contextual, consensual, cultural, changeable and free from constraining and confining strictures and structures. As Alain Finkelkraut has demonstrated, eighteenth century romantics and traditionalists, attempting to beat back the advance of the Enlightenment, adopted strikingly relativistic positions. Johann Gottfried Herder argued, for example, that all nations had their own ways of thinking and being, and that these ways, in some important sense, defined who they were, and could thus not be judged by any standard other than that of their own culture.<sup>24</sup> This conflict between universalism and nationalistic cultural relativism, which Finkelkraut names *volksgeist*, is according to Finkelkraut, still highly operative today, leaving us a world marked by the "... terrible and pathetic encounter of the fanatic and the zombie."<sup>25</sup>

Of course, the notion of *volksgeist* is irredeemably contaminated by ideas of blood and soil, and is seen, rightly or wrongly<sup>26</sup> as having found its final expression in the genocidal romanticism of Hitler's Germany. However, to place Herder immovably in this tradition, even at its beginning, is to run the risk of confusing context with content. Herder was undoubtedly writing as a partisan in the curiously eighteenth century contestation between exclusivist romanticism and universalistic utilitarianism, and more specifically, between chauvinistic nationalism and what was seen by Herder at least, as the inherent Franco-supremacism of the Enlightenment.<sup>27</sup> However, once this is accounted for, Herder's argument can be seen as simply another expression of the ongoing, possibly even inherently religious / cultural struggle between tradition and innovation, between the boons of progress and the security of convention, and not least between universal and in-group conceptions of morality, albeit in a very particular historical moment.

Consequently, if one, to escape unwelcome associations, speaks not of *volksgeist*, but simply of "*tribal spirit*", then Herder and his ilk fall into relief as simply eighteenth

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<sup>24</sup> Alain Finkelkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> That is to say: the intellectual who, feeling that all is relative, is unable to think, and the universities who are so chauvinistically committed to ideas of universal truth, that they refuse to think. Alain Finkelkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 135.

<sup>26</sup> As Hannah Arendt notes, the Nazis, though enamored of the rhetoric of blood and soil, are best understood as a pan movement, which quickly outgrew simple nationalism, and subsequently had nothing but contempt for nationalism, favoring an idiosyncratic internationalist base on the notion that natural ascendancy of German blood made them natural masters of not just Germany, but in fact, all soil. Hannah Arendt. *Origins of Totalitarianism*. p. 261.

<sup>27</sup> Alain Finkelkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 8.

century advocates of one side of an eternal conflict over the nature of morality and the meaning, importance, and in many ways, metaphysical significance of group loyalty. Herder defends prejudice<sup>28</sup> by arguing that prejudice helps people to be happy by taking "... them back to their center, attaches them firmly to their roots, lets them flourish in their own way, makes them more impassioned ... The most ignorant nation, the one with the most prejudices, is often superior in this respect ..."<sup>29</sup> This assertion can, and indeed, should be seen simply as a re-articulation of this basic human conflict of competing prejudices. As Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn argue:

Historically and anthropologically, peoples have always had a name for themselves. In a great many cases, that name meant 'the people' to set the owners of that name off against all other people who were considered of lesser quality in some way. If the differences between the people and some other society were particularly large in terms of religion, language, manners, customs, and so on, then such others were seen as less than fully human: pagans, savages, or even animals.<sup>30</sup>

Thus it seems safe to assume that neither universalism nor tribal spirit emerged fully formed with the Enlightenment. Even looking at the New Testament, there seems to be an ongoing debate as to whether Jesus - emerging in the context of a seemingly divine betrayal of God's special covenant with God's chosen people<sup>31</sup> - came as the savior of the chosen people, or of all people. The Gospel of Mark for example, has a Greek woman coming to Jesus and pleading with him to cast the devil out of her daughter, only to be rebuffed by Jesus on the grounds that she is foreign and that as such Jesus must: "Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to the dogs."<sup>32</sup> Matthew likewise, has Jesus telling his disciples that a "brother" who sins and is rebuked and yet fails to turn from sin, "let him be to you as an heathen man."<sup>33</sup> This is not to argue, as John Hartung has,<sup>34</sup> that the morality of the Gospels are irredeemably obsessed with notions of a righteous tribal in-group forever at odds with a heathen out-group, but simply that this point seems debatable, with both perspectives seeming well-evidenced. Jesus does after all, heal the Greek

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<sup>28</sup> Prejudice here is not meant in the modern derogatory sense, but simply in the sense of traditional beliefs that are believed simply because they have always been believed.

<sup>29</sup> Alain Finkielkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> Frank Chalk & Kurt Jonassohn. *The History and Sociology of Genocide*. p. 28.

<sup>31</sup> See Bart Ehrman's discussion of God's failure to keep the promise made through the prophets that if the children of Israel kept God's laws, God would see to the safety, security and prosperity of the nation. Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem*. pp. 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> Mark 7:27.

<sup>33</sup> Mark 18:15-18.

<sup>34</sup> John Hartung. "Love Thy Neighbor: The Evolution of In-Group Morality" (First published in *Skeptic*, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1995) Reprinted @ <http://www.lrainc.com/swtaboo/tabooos/ltn01.html>

woman's daughter, albeit only once she has accepted her status as a dog saying: yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs.<sup>35</sup> Somewhat less ambiguously, the parable of the Good Samaritan seems to say that a righteous heathen is greater in God's sight than an unrighteous priest.<sup>36</sup>

As such, the universalism of the Enlightenment is not demonstrative of any shockingly new idea, but was simply a new-found conviction that - to steal another phrase from Finkelkraut - the primacy of "... thinking over knitting, or chewing betel nuts ..." <sup>37</sup> could be claimed with the same certainty with which the ecclesiastics claimed that "... God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." <sup>38</sup> The Enlightenment claim that the light of reason and logic and truth was equally applicable everywhere and available to everyone (with enough education), could be seen, in many ways, as a secular re-articulation of Paul's claim of a Christ in whom there was neither "... Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female ..." <sup>39</sup> Likewise, Herder's opposition to what he regarded as the French attempt to use the reason of the age to champion their own superiority and culturally colonize and eventually subjugate the rest of the world, and the concomitant claim to the centrality of land to culture, could be taken as an intellectual and philosophical restating of the Psalmist's question "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" <sup>40</sup>

Thus, given the wealth of competing cultures and contexts, cultural schemas, political agendas and national ambitions, moral restraints and religious convictions, into whose service, ideas of universality or relativism have been pressed, it seems that all that can safely be inferred from a rejection of relativism is the rejection itself. Such rejections tell us nothing of use about the underlying position, beliefs or modernity of those doing the rejecting.

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<sup>35</sup> Mark 7:28.

<sup>36</sup> Luke 10:25-37.

<sup>37</sup> Alain Finkelkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 1.

<sup>38</sup> John 3:16.

<sup>39</sup> Galatians 3:26-29.

<sup>40</sup> Psalms 137:4.

To some degree, this rejection of relativism seems to be tacitly accepted, as all such discussion of the supposed modernity of fundamentalism and fundamentalists end up centering on the fundamentalist's attitude towards technology. Marty and Appleby, for example, base their claim on the comparing and contrasting of fundamentalists to the Amish, while Bruce Lawrence, while still claiming that the theory tells us all we need to know, argues that:

Fundamentalists are not atavistic Luddites opposed to the instrumentalities of modern media, transport, or warfare. Fundamentalists relate fully to the infrastructures that have produced the unprecedented options for communication and mobility that today's world offers. Fundamentalists are modern.<sup>41</sup>

However, again this is highly dubious. Almost any group when measured against the Amish, or the popular conception of the Luddites will seem modern, if only in the narrow sense of their technological savvy. However, the Amish are not, in fact, representative of pre-modernity, or even anti-modernity, or really anything but the self-sustaining Anabaptist quietist movements of the sixteenth century.

The example of the Amish actually undercuts the validity of the argument, by bringing into stark relief the fact that the cost of rejecting technological modernity is so much higher than the cost of embracing it, so much so, that the two positions cannot be considered symmetrical. Acceptance of technology is in fact the default position, requiring no special commitment or ideological justification. Technology is simply a feature of the world we are born into.

As such, the question, if indeed there is one, is surely not about whether we should confirm or deny the modernity of fundamentalists in terms of how they differ from the Amish, but rather, in terms of how they differ from secular society at large. In such a theoretical rearrangement, the use of technology is less relevant than the relationship to the technology, the degree to which it is understood, and the ability to modify the technology to suit specific needs and wants. Thus it seems prudent to distinguish between the willingness to use technology, and the ability to create technology.

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<sup>41</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence. *Defenders of God*. pp. 1-2.



Of course, one could argue that such a metric is setting the bar of true modernity too high, as most people, even those who consider themselves modern, have never contributed directly to the development of new technology. However, this is largely the point. Fundamentalists are modern, in the sense that they are citizens in a modern world in which technology is often an inescapable aspect of life. To argue that it is noteworthy that fundamentalist movements make use of technology, is in effect, to start from the unspoken conviction that fundamentalists are in fact so backwards, so ignorant, and so divorced from the rest of the human community that to see them making use of technology makes one marvel - to steal a phrase from Doctor Johnson - not that it is done well, but that it is done at all.

Of course, this was the dominant cultural assumption in the late 1980's when Marty, Appleby and Lawrence were writing and this attitude to some degree persist today. However in their noble attempts to refute the notion of fundamentalists as iron age throw-backs, these writers have gone too far the other way, presenting fundamentalism as a collection of uniquely modern movements, and fundamentalists individuals as inherently modern partisans in an unquestionably modern war. However, such arguments eat their own tail. If one accepts that fundamentalists are simply as modern as the world around them, are as modern as everyone else, then their modernity cannot be considered their defining characteristic. If we are to accept that fundamentalists are neither less, nor more modern than the society in which they move, and moreover, are precisely as modern as the world and people around them, and modern in exactly the same sense, which is to say modern by default and by accident of history and birth, then their modernity cannot be considered a statement of temporal loyalty, underlying conviction, or even as demonstrative of a causal modernity of mind. Thus the degree to which fundamentalists embrace, or - perhaps more to the point - fail to reject the modern world is, almost entirely irrelevant. In this view, the modern world and modern technology becomes simply "*stuff*", and the choice to make use of that "*stuff*" cannot be taken as being an expression of any underlying meaning. However, alternately, if we wish to pursue the notion that fundamentalists are not simply modern by birth, but by active, proactive and passionate habits of mind, then we must return to the questions of relationship to technology, and the ability to modify and create technology.

***If Evolution Is Outlawed, Only Outlaws Will Evolve:***

**Fundamentalism and the race to the future.**

This in turn, leads us to the inescapable fact that though we live in a time when the technology of innovation has been democratized to the point that new innovations are routinely produced by small groups of college students or dropouts - both Microsoft and Macintosh were launched by small groups of enthusiasts who grew up around Bill Gates and Steve Jobs respectively,<sup>42</sup> while the Google empire started as the graduate research project of Google's co-founder and president Larry Page – fundamentalists have as yet not produced any innovation that has changed the technological landscape around them.

Of course, it could be argued that this democratization of innovation is still beset, to some degree, by matters of entrenched privilege, as those who have the option of dropping out of college represent an elite of sorts. However, such an objection has two problems. Firstly, if American Christian fundamentalists do indeed lack traditional economic privileges, this disadvantage must be weighed against the considerable advantages of having their own universities, media organs, 'research' institutes and the much-vaunted support of the larger religious community.

Furthermore, the simple fact is that many of the innovations of the last twenty years have come from people with no access to resources other than their own, and who enjoyed no community support (at least in the sense that the term is usually understood). The teenaged 'criminals' who developed the technology to transmit large files over the internet as a means to steal copyrighted material, mainly music and movies, first through 'peer to peer' programs such as Napster, and later, the development of 'bit torrents', cannot really be said to have enjoyed any advantage not enjoyed by the computer science students of Liberty University. Likewise, the emergence of web-based video that led to the rise of YouTube, video blogs and the sale of television programming over the internet was originally driven by pornographers and fans of pornography hoping to find a way to either sell or share pornography over the web. For example in 2001, four years before YouTube was

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<sup>42</sup> For a full early history of Microsoft and Apple, see Paul Freiberger. *Fire in the Valley: The Making of the Personal Computer*.

launched, the BBC was already reporting that the trade in “internet porn” which had been worth \$140 million in 1997, had more than doubled, reaching a worth of \$366 million<sup>43</sup> and explained the sudden growth as a result of the emergence of a “... sizeable market for movies.”<sup>44</sup> One could even argue that the need for ever bigger hard disks and more expansive storage space was driven by the needs of pornography enthusiasts and pirates, as the BBC, with almost touching quaintness, warns that some movies could be as big as 100MB and would “fill up your hard drive in no time.”<sup>45</sup>

As such, given that Christian fundamentalists could be claimed to make up anywhere between a quarter and a half of the US population, simply as a matter of demographics, we should expect that between a quarter and a half of our internet innovations would have come from small groups of enthusiastic, if amateur young fundamentalists.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, one must consider the apparent fact that religious background can massively influence a person’s chances of achieving scientific or technological glory. There are, for example, marked disparities in the religious backgrounds of Nobel laureates, with the world’s Jewish population, making up only a quarter of one percent of the world’s people, having produced, according to JINFO.ORG,<sup>47</sup> 27% of its Nobel laureates in the sciences, an over-representation of more than a hundred times.

If we are to accept Marty and Appleby’s claim that “Because they are alert reactors but not reactionaries, inventors more than preservers, fundamentalists are very much at home in the world around them ...”, we must ask why fundamentalist inventiveness has not put them in the vanguard of the race for the future? Why is there no great pantheon of fundamentalist ‘dot.com’ pioneers? Why has no Google-style IT empire emerged from say, Liberty, or even Bob Jones University? Why in short, are young

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A523504>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> The number of American fundamentalists is, of course, impossible to quantify in absolute terms, as most surveys do not ask people if they are fundamentalists, and not all, perhaps even not most, fundamentalists would choose such a self-description. However, if we look at opinion polls on subjects which seem reflective of an uncritical acceptance of religious tradition in the face of the evidence, for example, the series of Gallup polls between 1982 and 2004, which found that between 44% and 47% of Americans believe that God created man in his present form at one time within the last 10,000 years, we at least have a starting point. Of course, claiming such a belief is not evidentiary, but only suggestive, of fundamentalist belief, which is why a 50% margin of error is being used.

<sup>47</sup> JINFO.org is a website which claims to seek to counter anti-Semitism by accurately describing the Jewish contribution to the cultural, scientific, and technological evolution of civilization. Found@ <http://www.jinfo.org/index.html>

fundamentalists either less motivated or less able to produce new technologies that would help them spread and disseminate the word of God, than their secular contemporaries are to produce new ways to steal music or view pornography?

The answer here, is not that fundamentalists are not modern, or even that they are second-class citizen of the modern world, but simply that the question is wrong. The important point here is not that of modern versus pre, post, or anti-modern. Such competing notions of modernity, to some degree, essentially miscomprehend the nature of fundamentalism.

To some degree, miscomprehension is inevitable in this context, as we lack any real, or even agreed-upon definition of the term fundamentalism, which in common parlance has come to mean simply “stiff-necked” and “unsophisticated” and is used as everything from a noun to an adjective, to an insult used promiscuously to describe figures as diverse as Bin Laden and Richard Dawkins. Nor are academic definitions less troublesome, focusing either on the notion that fundamentalism is a modern reaction against the modern world, which, as discussed above, are knotty in their own right, or in massively-complex taxonomies which are not only cumbersome, but deeply problematic in their own right.

We can see these problems perhaps most clearly in Robert Frykenberg’s attempt to describe the common features of fundamentalist movements. Among a myriad of other features which Frykenberg claims to be universal among fundamentalist movements are a conviction of Truth as laid out in a central doctrine, as well as an ideology and world view as found in “sacred text” which is considered unquestionably authoritative and is “expressed through sacred tradition and sacred heritage” which points to a “hallowed past and a golden future”<sup>48</sup> and which finds ultimate expression in *the Messenger* who “embodies or personifies the Truth and is the original person who conveyed it.”<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Robert E Frykenberg, *Accounting for Fundamentalisms in South Asia*, in Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (ed). *Accounting for Fundamentalisms*. p. 593.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

This is, of course, a reductive and over-simplified version of Frykenberg's taxonomy. However, such a reduction does actually serve to reveal problematic features. The most obvious problem is that to draw a definition from features shared by fundamentalist movements, one must first have already created a set of movements defined as fundamentalist, which obviously cannot be defined by the parameters thus revealed. Thus the taxonomy teeters into tautology, as the evidence for the fundamentalism of a group becomes the fidelity with which a group adheres to a classification devised to describe them. Furthermore, such descriptive definitions actually involve a multiplication of ambiguity, as all the descriptive terms then, to some degree, require definitions of their own. This in turn, leads to the problem, as with Berman, that the taxonomy is rather too impressionistic to enable easy, or even non-controversial classification. Given liberal enough definitions of Frykenberg's terms, almost any political and almost all religious movements, from the flagellants of the Great Mortality, to the more eager adherents to the cult of Stalin could be considered fundamentalists, which may very well be the case, but which renders the taxonomy somewhat redundant.

This is not intended as a criticism of Frykenberg. The conviction that we know fundamentalism when we see it, is inescapable, and the enumeration, adumbration and nomenclature of the apparent commonalities are indispensable. However, such self-limiting definition of fundamentalists as people who are fundamentalist because of their fundamentalism, is in itself, a barrier to enquiry.

***The Prism of the Divine: Troeltsch and the New Definition.***

The clearest road forward seems not to seek a workable syntheses of the current definitions, but rather to seek a new definition. Of those available, the most useful and best definition of fundamentalism, may well be Ernst Troeltsch's distinction between the church and the sect. According to Troeltsch, the basic difference is that the church recognizes both divine and natural law, but accepts that "... natural laws are necessarily different from the perfect law ... " and does not "... expect the laity to act

according to the latter law.”<sup>50</sup> The sect, in contrast, recognizes and acts according to only the divine law.<sup>51</sup>

Troeltsch’s distinction, thus formulated, gives us an invaluable insight into the fundamentalist thought world. If taken seriously, Troeltsch’s distinction leads inevitably to the conclusion that the inescapable cognitive consequence of viewing only the divine law as informative, normative and operative is the reduction of the ‘real world’, which is to say the world available to us as mediated by our senses, to an unimportant, undifferentiated and chimeral chaos which is comprehensible only through the all-encompassing prism of the divine law. As such, we must conclude that fundamentalists are neither modern, nor pre, nor anti-modern, as their fundamentalism supercedes any such temporal loyalties.

In a very real sense, Troeltsch’s formulation re-crafts the question as one of myth, in so far as the concrete world of the real, the world of the natural law, is rendered essentially and irredeemably mythic, in the Eliadian sense of a ritualistic retelling of an inexpressible absolute and primordial truth.<sup>52</sup> Thus, to the fundamentalist, in Troeltsch’s formulation, the world and everything in it, does not actually exist in any important sense, but as simply an unreal backdrop against which the struggle for reality, in the form of salvation, is waged. This is where the thought-world becomes complete and where fundamentalists are saved from an anonymous Hinduism, as while the concrete world becomes reduced to myth, the mythic world, the world of God and soul and meaning has been demythologized and rendered concrete. Thus “reality” becomes a reflection, marker and signifier of the hyper-reality of the divine.

As such, the question of the fundamentalist failure in technological innovation simply does not arise, as in the fundamentalist worldview, technology is simply notional stuff in a metaphorical world which, as determined by its use, is either gifted by Providence as a tool for the reclamation and redemption of the world into the realm of the “really real”, or infected with the forces of darkness to complete the world’s damnation into the depths of the meaningless. Thus, since the reality of a technology is determined by

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<sup>50</sup> Hans G. Kippenburg. “Religious History, Displaced By Modernity”. *International Review of the History of Religion* Vol.XLVII, No.3 2000. p. 228.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Mircea Eliade. *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. p . 23.

its use in the furtherance of God's will, the creation of new and thus unredeemed and as such, valueless technology would be an act of the most superlative futility. By the same token however, such a view also explains the passionate intensity with which fundamentalists embrace and make use of existing technology, as by making use of the technology in the partisan struggle to make the word of God supreme, they are in effect redeeming the technology, and in some small way, the world that produced it.

As Marty and Appleby put it:

If television is what assaults the traditionalist community, fundamentalists seize television's techniques and excel in the use of the medium. American Protestant fundamentalists and televangelists have shown how well this can work...<sup>53</sup>

To a certain extent, aggressive contestation over the metaphysical significance of the modern world and the passion inherent in such a view of the fruits of modernity can appear as evidence of a uniquely modern mode of mind. However, it must be remembered that the underlying ideological commitments makes any such fidelity to, or critique of the world, inherently ad hoc and provisional, and thus represents no over-arching allegiances to, or rejection of the modern world. Such allegiances will only last as long as such aspects are either helpful or unhelpful to the movement. This state of mind was perhaps best summed up by Henry Morris - the coiner of the term "creation science", founder of the Institute for Creation Research and so called "Darwin of the creationist movement"<sup>54</sup> – who observed that: "When Science and the Bible differ, science has obviously misinterpreted its data."<sup>55</sup>

It is here, in the contestation of the theory of evolution, representing as it does the longest, most open-ended and, in many ways, most revealing engagement of fundamentalists with the world of modern knowledge, that we find a true picture of the fundamentalist mind. Ironically, Marty and Appleby actually use the work of scientific creationists in their attempt to prove the inherent rationality of fundamentalism and fundamentalists, claiming that the ongoing struggle by fundamentalists to get creationism taught in schools, against the protestations of biologists and the law, is not essentially a battle of faith against reason, as:

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<sup>53</sup> Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby. *The Glory and the Power*. p. 31.

<sup>54</sup> Matt Schudel. "Henry Morris; Intellectual Father of 'Creation Science'". *Washington Post*, March 1, 2006; P.B06 found@ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/28/AR2006022801716.html>

<sup>55</sup> Francis S. Collins. *The Language of God*. p.5.

... the proponents of ‘Creation Research’ want to argue their case on the basis of the fossil record, common sense, and scholastic philosophy. The fact that all mainstream scientists reject such arguments does not mean that they are not intended to be based on reason.<sup>56</sup>

While to some degree it may indeed seem, as Marty and Appleby contend, that creationism generally, and more particularly, ‘creation research’ is an attempt by fundamentalists to use modernity’s own weapons of science, reason and logic to overthrow a secular world view in which there is no longer a place for God, this contention seems less true, the closer one looks. To read what creationists say and follow their arguments is to discover that in fact, creationism is not a body of scientific thought, or even a definable ‘scholastic philosophy’. It is a massed and tangled web of egregious fabrications and purposely-misleading assumptions designed not as an offensive in the war of ideas, but rather to convince the already certain, and create uncertainty among the uncommitted.

Of course, not all creationist or evolution skeptics are the same, and they run the gamut from those like Ken Ham, the founder, President and CEO, of the ministry Answers in Genesis and driving force behind the Creation Museum<sup>57</sup> who base their creationism purely on the conviction that “The Bible is the Word of God and is infallible ...”<sup>58</sup> to those who do actually attempt to use the revelations of science to prove the impossibility of unaided evolution. Most notable, and to some degree interesting among the latter group are those of what might be called “the privileged planet school”, who base their arguments squarely on modern science, most centrally astronomy, to argue that the qualities of Earth are so wholesome and favorable to life as to be not merely fortunate, but in fact miraculous, and indeed so miraculous, that the chances against even one planet being so blessed, massively outstrip the number of available planets, and thus the existence of Earth is proof of a well-disposed creator.

However, even within this school of thought, the allegiance to science runs a poor second to the polemical need to insert a creator into the equation. One of the more famous - or perhaps infamous - examples of this, is the equation formulated by Canadian astronomer and old-Earth creationist Hugh Ross, who calculated 322 factors

<sup>56</sup> Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby. *The Glory and the Power*. p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Ken Ham. <http://www.answersingenesis.org/home/area/about/ham.asp>

<sup>58</sup> Ken Ham. *The Lie: Evolution: Genesis – The Key to Defending Your Faith*. p. 48.



which he claimed to be essential to life and concluded that the chance was “less than 1 chance in  $10^{282}$ ,” that even one such life-supporting planetary body would occur anywhere in the universe without invoking divine miracles.<sup>59</sup>

All of this may seem perfectly rational and modern and, indeed scientific but for the fact that Ross’s numbers are a self-conscious swindle. The most egregious aspect of this deception, although certainly not the only one, is that Ross has promiscuously padded the list of necessities for the emergence of life, with factors that self-evidently emerged after the emergence of life, including 9 different types of bacteria, the existence of plants, the existence of “carbonate-producing animals” and the presence, but not over abundance of forest and grass fires.<sup>60</sup>

However, despite the fact that Ross’s ‘calculations’ are reprehensibly dishonest, and all that is required to recognize this, is to actually read them, Ross’s equation has gained major currency, and not simply with the lunatic fringe. Ralph O. Muncaster’s book *Dismantling Evolution*, eagerly blurbed by Discovery Institute fellows Behe and Dembski (perhaps the two most respected names in the creation / intelligent design movement) dedicates four pages to repeating Ross’s numbers,<sup>61</sup> before declaring that these numbers prove that “Earth was clearly designed ... and the odds of the existence of another such planet are nil ...”<sup>62</sup>

Nor are such misrepresentations, misleading claims and outright falsehoods anomalous. While Marty and Appleby are correct in that creationists often seek to make rhetorical use of the fossil record, they emphatically do not debate the finer points of the evidence found in the fossil record. Instead creationist ‘debate’ of the fossil record is based either upon imaginary anachronistic fossils of “... ‘advanced’ animals in the same strata as their much earlier ‘ancestors’ ...”<sup>63</sup> which they claim to be ubiquitous in the fossil record, but which, in fact have never been found<sup>64</sup> or

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<sup>59</sup> Hugh Ross. “Probability For Life On Earth.” <http://www.reasons.org/design/galaxy-design/probabilities-life-earth-2001>

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ralph O. Muncaster. *Dismantling Evolution*. pp. 225-228.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid. p. 229.

<sup>63</sup> Ian Wishart. *Eve’s Bite*. p. 61.

<sup>64</sup> Jerry Coyne. *Why Evolution is True*. p. 57.

conversely, on claiming that fossils which do exist – those demonstrating so called transitional forms – simply do not exist.

While such blanket declarations on what is and isn't to be found in the fossil record may seem hubristic and unsupportable, there are very good reasons to be comfortable with such assertions. The idea of “anachronistic fossils”<sup>65</sup> has become a shibboleth of evolutionary thought, so much so that J. B. S. Haldane's famous reply: “Fossil rabbits in the Precambrian!” has become the standard answer to the question of how evolution might be falsified.<sup>66</sup> As such, if even one anachronistic fossil were to be found, the theory of evolution would be utterly destroyed.

The on-going contestation in American courts over the teaching of evolution – centering as it does on the claimed necessity to inform students about the problems with the theory of evolution<sup>67</sup> – could be won at a stroke if even one anachronistic fossils could be produced. Even if we accept, as creationists contend, that there is some great atheist conspiracy to suppress any evidence that would counter evolution, we are still faced with the question of why, if creationists have this evidence, they have never actually produced it? The fact that no such anachronistic fossils have ever been produced can be safely taken as evidence that they, in fact, do not exist.

Although somewhat less fanciful and obviously fraudulent, the argument about the supposed lack of transitional fossils, is in fact no more credible, nor any less demonstrative of a resolute refusal to actually engage with the evidence behind the claim. In fact, to some degree, the transitional fossil argument demonstrates just how little interest creationists take in the science they are apparently trying to refute, and just how much creationism is based on the recycling of arguments long after they ceased to be plausible. The best example here is the on-going argument over the

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<sup>65</sup> Jerry Coyne. *Why Evolution is True*. p. 57.

<sup>66</sup> Bayard Taylor. *The Late Great Ape Debate*. p. 123.

<sup>67</sup> The so called Lemon test, derived from supreme courts ruling in *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, holds that in legislation concerning religious matters the court may sidestep the Establishment Clause so long as the government's action has a genuine secular purpose, does not have the primary effect of either advancing or inhibiting religion and does not result in "excessive government entanglement" with religion, (Judge Jones, MEMORANDUM OPINION, TAMMY KITZMILLER, et al VS DOVER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, et al., p.90 @ [http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220\\_kitzmiller\\_342.pdf](http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220_kitzmiller_342.pdf))

evolution of the whale. In his 1985 book *Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record*, Duane Gish argued that:

There simply are no transitional forms in the fossil record between the marine mammals and their supposed land mammal ancestors . . . It is quite entertaining, starting with cows, pigs, or buffaloes, to attempt to visualize what the intermediates may have looked like. Starting with a cow, one could even imagine one line of descent which prematurely became extinct, due to what might be called an “udder failure.”<sup>68</sup>

To illustrate his assertions that not only *were* there no, but *could be* no transitional fossils between land mammals and whales, Gish would show audiences a cartoon of the front half of a Jersey cow, complete with cowbell, attached to a fish tail, and then mock the very possibility of any such animal having ever existed. However, in the intervening years, a multitude of such animals (minus the cowbell) have indeed been found.

Jerry Coyne sums up the story of whale evolution as told by these discoveries as showing a clear line, running from Ambulocetus (literally, “walking whale”), who first appeared fifty million years ago, and who, though still possessing hooves, had already made many adaptations to a life spent largely in shallow water, including an elongation of the skull and foreshortening of the limbs. Then forty-seven million years ago, Rodhocetus emerges, having made the first steps towards giving up on the land entirely, with smaller limbs, and nostrils which have moved backward, starting a progressive migration that would lead ultimately to the blowhole, and an expiation of the back bone which anchored the beginnings of a tail. Then, at forty million years ago, Basilosaurus and Dorudon, the first fully aquatic mammals emerge, in more or less the body pattern we see today in whales, with a massive 50 foot body and blowholes atop the skull.”<sup>69</sup>

Coyne concludes by pointing out that probably the main reason the evolution of whales was so long a matter of debate, was a result of it having happened with remarkable speed, producing fully-formed whales from land animals in roughly the same time it took us to diverge from our last common ancestor with chimpanzees, and thus left fewer fossils than might otherwise have been expected. However, as

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<sup>68</sup> Duane T. Gish. *Evolution: The Challenge of the Fossil Record*. pp. 78-79.

<sup>69</sup> Jerry Coyne. *Why Evolution is True*. pp. 53-55.

late as 2006, Ann Coulter, writing under what she called "... the generous tutoring of ... creditable intelligent design proponents and men of science, Michael Behe, David Berlinski and William Dembski,"<sup>70</sup> <sup>71</sup> still stated that "The evolutionists' proof is their capacity to concoct a story. They say the whale "evolved" when a bear fell into the ocean."<sup>72</sup>

Furthermore, it seems as though, to some degree at least, this obtuse refusal to be even passably conversant with the state of the current evidence might actually be an intentional ploy, as the more completely creationists exclude themselves from the academic debate by their insistence on maintaining what provably isn't so and refusal to engage with what is so, the more convincingly they can claim to be systematically excluded from the debate. In such a world, even the fact that scientists sometimes react badly to, as Kipling might have said, "seeing the truth they've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools", becomes evidence of a frightened and desperate defensiveness. As Coulter, writing in what might well have been the plea of the freshly-humiliated Behe, has it:

In the end, evolutionists' only argument is contempt. The cultists know that if people were allowed to hear the arguments against evolution for just sixty seconds, all would be lost. So they demonize the people making those arguments. You're just saying that because you believe in God! You probably believe in a flat Earth, too! You sound like a Holocaust revisionist! That's all you ever get.<sup>73</sup>

Dembski himself makes a similar claim, writing that:

What keeps Darwinism alive? Why is it so difficult to debate its merits fairly? In so pluralistic a society as ours, why don't alternative views about life's origin and development have a legitimate place in academic discourse? ... We are dealing here with something more than a straightforward determination of scientific facts or confirmation of scientific theories. Rather, we are dealing with competing worldviews and incompatible metaphysical systems... the naturalistic metaphysic that shapes and controls what theories of biological origins are permitted on the playing field in advance of any discussion or weighing of evidence. This metaphysic is so pervasive and powerful that it not only rules alternative views out of court, but it cannot even permit itself to be criticized.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ann Coulter. *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*. Dust jacket.

<sup>71</sup> It is also worth noting that Behe's previous claims about the lack of fossil evidence for the evolution of whales, had been so conclusively rebutted a year earlier in the Kitzmiller case, that Judge Jones had concluded that Behe "... distorts and misrepresents evidence in the fossil record". Judge Jones, TAMMY KITZMILLER, et al. Vs DOVER AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT, et al. MEMORANDUM OPINION, December 20, 2005. p. 88. @ [http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220\\_kitzmiller\\_342.pdf](http://msnbcmedia.msn.com/i/msnbc/sections/news/051220_kitzmiller_342.pdf)

<sup>72</sup> Ann Coulter. *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*. p. 149.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 158.

<sup>74</sup> William A. Dembski. *What Every Theologian Should Know About Creation, Evolution and Intelligent Design*. pp. 6-7.

Thusly, by the strange alchemy of a persecution complex, paranoid worldview and conspiracy theory, the lack of any scientific credibility is transformed into an unquestionable credibility. However, as hysterical and irrational as such arguments may seem, they do, in an odd way, support Marty and Appleby's assertion of the basic rationality of the creationist, at least inasmuch as there is nothing actually wrong with creationist reasoning. If there were indeed irrefutable evidence that evolution is wrong, then the refusal of scientists to engage with such evidence, and their out-of-hand and somewhat arrogant dismissal of such claims, would seem suggestive of a chauvinistic conspiracy. Likewise, the fact that Coulter is confident enough of her audience's understanding of evolution, as to not have to explain what is wrong with the idea that whales evolved when a bear fell into the water, does seem to suggest that creationists are not entirely ignorant of evolutionary reasoning.

Furthermore, creationists do seem to possess a very sharp eye for bad reasoning, being able to see it even when it is not, in fact, there. It is often claimed, for example, that the Darwinian claim of survival of the fittest is an empty tautology<sup>75</sup> or simply circular reasoning<sup>76</sup>, since, it is argued that any reasonable definition of fitness must include the ability to survive, thus rendering the formulation as those most fit to survive are most likely to survive, which thus renders the theory true, but meaningless. Nor, would they be wrong, if Darwin's theory really was simply an assertion that fitness leads to survival. Since however, Darwin's formulation is in fact not based on fitness in the commonly understood sense, but rather fitness as a measure of reproductive success, which is in turn a measure of adaptation to the environment, Darwin's formulation is far from tautological, and is in fact massively open-ended, offering a mechanism by which organisms can adapt to their environment, which in turn will alter the environment, thus spurring further adaptation.

In many ways this example and the admittedly tiny sample above, are indicative of the whole. The flaw in creationist arguments is not the reasoning, which is usually sound, and often strong, but the facts, which are universally bad, and are in fact so bad as to lack even the appearance of credibility. As such, if we are to take Marty and

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<sup>75</sup> Phillip E. Johnson. *Darwin on Trial*. pp. 175-176.

<sup>76</sup> Gary Parker. *Creation Facts of Life*. p. 87.

Appleby's contention seriously, and accept that creationists are simply so impressed by such claims as to, with no urging of faith, dismiss one of the most well-established theories in all of science, is to attribute to them a level of ignorant and gullible credulity which is frankly incredible. To take such arguments seriously is ultimately to accept that creationism is nothing more than a contradictory and self-refuting conspiracy theory.

A much more plausible explanation is that the creationist scenarios are believed and repeated, because in the fundamentalist mind, they actually do make sense, and seem factually credible because they are informed and based on a pre-existing and faith-based commitment to a creationist view. To take the issue of transitional fossils as an example, if one '*knows*' that evolution is not true, one also '*knows*' that no animal could possibly evolve into another and thus, no transitional forms could possibly exist, meaning that scientists claiming to have found such patently impossible fossils, must be either mistaken or criminal, which proves science to be either so prone to error as to be empty of actual content or else a massive and ungodly conspiracy.

However, here again, it is vital to remember that this is not demonstrative of either ignorance or dishonesty, but simply of an essentially different understanding of the nature of truth. To the fundamentalist, all notions of knowledge and truth start from the basic position that whatever is believed about God and His world is axiomatically true, and indeed so true as to be beyond the ken of evidence or argumentation. As such, anything that contradicts faith, can simply not be true, while anything that confirms faith - no matter how apparently dubious - can ever be untrue.

Ken Ham stresses this point quite explicitly, arguing that: "Truth is spiritually discerned. Without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit there can be no real understanding."<sup>77</sup> Ham reinforces this point, writing to those who have had their faith damaged by geology professors that:

Even if your geology professor were here and said things I don't understand because I am not a geologist, if what he says disagrees with the Bible, then he is wrong. If I can't explain why he is wrong, it only means that I don't have the evidence to know the errors in his argument ... I'm sure I could get a creationist geologist to find out why you professor is wrong, because the Bible will always be right.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ken Ham. *The Lie: Evolution: Genesis – The Key to Defending Your Faith*. p. 48.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

William Lane Craig puts forward much the same argument, in somewhat more scholarly terms, arguing that evidence is ultimately irrelevant, drawing the analogy of a man accused of a crime he knows he did not commit, but which all the evidence suggests he did, and concludes that just as the accused man is rational to maintain his innocence in the face of the evidence, so too is a believer who is "... too uninformed or ill-equipped to refute anti-Christian arguments ..." still "... rational in believing on the basis of the witness of the Spirit in his heart even in the face of such unrefuted objections."<sup>79</sup> Craig expands and clarifies this point, insisting that "... even a person confronted with what are for him unanswerable objections to Christian theism is, because of the work of the Holy Spirit, within his epistemic rights, nay, under epistemic obligation, to believe in God."<sup>80</sup>

Interestingly, returning to Troeltsch, this is exactly what we should expect to see. In the fundamentalist view, as delineated through an extrapolation of Troeltsch's formula, (as discussed earlier) reality is not a category or a concept which exists independently, but is rather both a product and the nature of the divine law. As such, since claims to truth are ultimately claims to, and of reality, then, axiomatically the truth or falsity of a claim can only be discerned by its orientation to the divine law. In such a thought-world, there can be no question as to the existence or credibility of either the divine law, or of the supporting divine reality which supports the law, as any question about the underlying reality is not simply a proposition of truth or falsity, but is a proposition that would, if allowed to be considered, destroy the very categories and existence of truth or falsity. Thus by denying the truth of the divine law, one is ultimately, in the fundamentalist view, denying the existence of truth. Since a claim that denies the existence of truth cannot itself be true, any claim that is either contradicting or threatening to faith is axiomatically false. However, ultimately truth or falsity are secondary considerations to the vital question of the contained existence of truth itself. As Ham puts it:

Surely, as Christians blessed with the conviction that arises from the work of the Holy Spirit, we must accept the Bible as the Word of God – otherwise, we have nothing. If the Bible is to be questioned and cannot be trusted, and if it is continually subject to re-interpretation based on what men believe they have discovered, then we

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<sup>79</sup> Steven B. Cowan (ed). *Five Views on Apologetics*. p. 35.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

have no absolute authority. We do not have the Word of the One who knows everything, which means we have no basis for anything.<sup>81</sup>

***Darwin and the Death of Morals: The argument from moral corruption.***

This, ultimately is the point. The debate over evolution has never been solely, or even primarily about the truth of a scientific theory, and the objections have never been presented on purely or even mainly on scientific grounds, but rather on the grounds that Darwinism is viewed as socially corrupting. As early as the Scopes Monkey Trial, perennial Democratic presidential candidate and, arguably most celebrated jurist of his generation, William Jennings Bryan proclaimed that:

All the ills from which America suffers can be traced back to the teaching of Evolution. It would be better to destroy every other book ever written and save just the first three chapters of Genesis.<sup>82</sup>

Meanwhile Henry Morris, the father of ‘creation science’ observed that:

Evolution is the root of atheism, of communism, nazism, anarchism, behaviorism, racism, economic imperialism, militarism, libertinism, anarchism, and all manner of anti-Christian systems of belief and practice.<sup>83</sup>

This argument has in recent years become one the main contentions of the intelligent design movement, especial the claim that Nazism was the logical outgrowth of Darwinism. In 1998, the Discovery Institute granted funding to historian and Discovery Institute fellow Richard Weikart to write a book “about the impact of Darwinian biology on the development of Nazism,”<sup>84</sup> which would cover not only “... politics but history in the humanities... ” and which Weikart announced beforehand would detail the effects of “... evolutionary ethics, social Darwinism, eugenics, and scientific racism in Germany, documenting the influence of evolutionary naturalism on the rise of National Socialism.”<sup>85</sup>

The book, finally published under the title *From Darwin to Hitler*, was (perhaps not surprisingly) roundly and enthusiastically debunked and criticized by everyone from the American Historical Review, to former Discovery Institute fellow Jeff Schloss for attributing to Darwin and his immediate colleagues views on race and racial hygiene

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<sup>81</sup> Ken Ham. *The Lie: Evolution: Genesis – The Key to Defending Your Faith*. p. 50.

<sup>82</sup> Mark C. Taylor. *After God*. p. 264.

<sup>83</sup> Philip Kitcher. *Abusing Science*. p. 186.

<sup>84</sup> Barbara Forrest & Paul R. Gross. *Creationism’s Trojan Horse*. p. 206.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid. pp. 206–207.



that they had never espoused,<sup>86</sup> and for counting any racist, eugenic or imperialistic claim made by any German academic - including those who vigorously opposed Darwin – as expressions of Darwinist thought.<sup>87</sup>

The most damning condemnation, however, came in Ann Taylor Allen's review for *The Journal of Modern History*, in which she pointed out that to Weikart, 'Darwinism' does not refer to "... the ideas of Darwin himself — which are never carefully analyzed ..." but rather on the notion of a "... secular ethic in which the preservation of the individual life was no longer a moral absolute..." but was "... subordinated to the welfare of the species as a whole." Allen notes that Weikart's thesis is in fact little more than a poorly-argued syllogistic tautology, basing itself on the claim that Darwinism is simply a disregard for the sanctity of life. Weikart counts as Darwinian all thinkers who "... advocated the violation of the 'right to life' through measures such as birth control, abortion, voluntary and compulsory 'euthanasia,' voluntary and compulsory sterilization, infanticide, and genocide ..." <sup>88</sup> and thusly demonstrates that Darwinism is nothing more than cult of death.

Furthermore, Taylor Allen notes that even Weikart's foundational claim that before Darwin "... European civilization was governed by ...the 'Judeo-Christian ethic' and its central principle, the 'right to life' ..." and that this principle was "reflected in European legal codes which strictly forbade assisted suicide, infanticide, and abortion ...", an ethic which is rather fatally undermined by the preponderance of the death penalty, the legal sanctioning of domestic abuse and child labor.<sup>89</sup>

However, despite the thrashing Weikart received from the academy, his thesis found a ready audience and became highly influential amongst the religious, becoming the central theme off Coral Ridge Ministries' video, *Darwin's Deadly Legacy*, and forming a sizable chunk of the pro-intelligent design "documentary" *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*. Finally, Weikart's ideas found their way into the hands of Dinesh D'Souza who distilled the book down to the claim that:

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<sup>86</sup> Jeff Schloss. "The Expelled Controversy: Overcoming or Raising Walls of Division?" @ <http://www.asa3.org/ASA/resources/Schloss200805.pdf>

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ann Taylor Allen. Book Review: "From Darwin to Hitler." *The Journal of Modern History*. No.78 (March 2006): pp.255–257.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

If Nazism represented the culmination of anything, it was that of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century ideology of social Darwinism. As historian Richard Weikart documents, both Hitler and Himmler were admirers of Darwin and often spoke of their role as enacting a 'law of nature' that guaranteed the 'elimination of the unfit.' Weikart argues that Hitler himself 'drew upon a bountiful fund of social Darwinist thought to construct his own racist philosophy' and concludes that while Darwinism is not a 'sufficient' intellectual explanation for Nazism, it is a 'necessary' one. Without Darwinism, there might not have been Nazism.<sup>90</sup>

While it is worth noting that D'Souza's willingness to accept the link between Darwinism and Nazism purely on the say-so of a discredited book by an anti-Darwinian partisan does somewhat damage Marty and Appleby's contention that those who oppose evolution do so for good scholarly reasons. The truly arresting element of this passage is just how derivative it is of Zygmunt Bauman's argument for the connection between modernity and the Holocaust. The last line in particular is almost a verbatim re-rendering of Bauman's claim that:

Modern civilization was not the Holocaust's *sufficient* condition; it was however most certainly its *necessary* condition. Without it, the Holocaust would have been unthinkable.<sup>91</sup>

The surprising feature here is not that D'Souza is aware of Bauman's arguments: D'Souza has, after all, been held up, by people as unlikely as Christopher Hitchens<sup>92</sup> and Michael Shermer<sup>93</sup> as the greatest and most well-read and erudite mind American Christian apologetics have so far produced in their own defense. Nor is it unexpected that he should latch onto Bauman while passing over the much more widely recognized Hannah Arendt in silence, since Arendt's claim that the origins of totalitarianism lay in the twin European sins of anti-Semitism and imperialism could not help but raise uncomfortable questions about the history of European Christendom. What is rather extraordinary is the fact that it has taken fundamentalist movements so long to discover Bauman and the fountain of critical theory which could, at least in their concern with the dehumanizing effects of the modern world, be of immeasurable utility. Why should fundamentalists expend the time and trouble of formulating their own condemnation of godless, immoral and murderous modernity, when such a critique already exists, already reviewed and accepted into the academic

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<sup>90</sup> Dinesh D'Souza. *What's So Great About Christianity*. p.136.

<sup>91</sup> Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. p.13.

<sup>92</sup> "Discussions with Richard Dawkins." Episode 1: *The Four Horsemen*

<sup>93</sup> Dinesh D'Souza, *What's So Great About Christianity*. dust jacket.

canon, in the works of, among others, Wolfgang Sofsky,<sup>94</sup> Max Weber<sup>95</sup>, Richard L. Rubenstein<sup>96</sup> and of course Bauman himself?

This is, of course, not to say that any of those listed above harbor fundamentalist sympathies, or that there are any particular political issues on which they would even form common cause with the fundamentalists. However, it is worth noting that a large part, perhaps even a majority of creationist argumentation relies on quote mining, or the practice of, as Philip Kitcher puts it, of ripping any qualifying comment from its context, and presenting it to "...convince the uninitiated that creationist theses are sometimes advanced by scientists in scientific debates."<sup>97</sup>

Stephen Jay Gould has become a particular target in the years since his death, with his argument for "Punctuated Equilibrium" - actually a theory which suggests that in the right circumstances, evolution can happen a lot more quickly than usually assumed<sup>98</sup> - being routinely presented as a refutation of evolution itself.<sup>99</sup> As such, if fundamentalists are prepared to take such liberties with the sciences, one must wonder why the present condemning theories of the humanities do not receive the same treatment? Even the Marxism of the Critical Theorists does not provide an answer, as most Marxists, who are to the fundamentalist mind, axiomatically atheistic, if not actually evil, consider the modern world to be an immoral and soulless chaos. Why should Wiekart have gone to all the trouble of doing his own research, and laboriously cataloging racist and eliminationist sentiments among nineteenth and twentieth century German intellectuals, when Bauman was just sitting there, proclaiming:

As a conception of the world, and even more importantly, as an effective instrument of political practice, racism is unthinkable without the advancement of modern science, modern technology and modern forms of state power. As such, racism is strictly a modern product. Modernity made racism possible ...<sup>100</sup>

In their conception of the modern world as a dehumanized industrial hell-scape, stripped bare and made meaningless by the goose-stepping march of rationalization,

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<sup>94</sup> Wolfgang Sofsky. *The Order of Terror: the Concentration Camp*.

<sup>95</sup> Max Weber. *Bureaucracy*

<sup>96</sup> Richard L. Rubenstein. *The Cunning of History*.

<sup>97</sup> Philip Kitcher. *Abusing Science: the Case Against Creationism*. p. 185.

<sup>98</sup> Stephen J. Gould and Niles Eldredge. "Punctuated Equilibria: an Alternative to Phyletic Gradualism." First published in Schopf and TJM Freeman (ed), *Models in Paleobiology*. pp. 82-115. Reprinted @ <http://www.blackwellpublishing.com/ridley/classictexts/eldredge.asp>

<sup>99</sup> John Templeton Baldwin. *Creation, Catastrophe, and Calvary*. p. 127. See also: Robin Attfield. *Creation, Evolution and Meaning*. p.111.

<sup>100</sup> Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. p. 76.

disenchantment and remorseless efficiency, the holocaust theorists do, in fact, present a prime target for out-of-context quoting, as D'Souza's recasting of Bauman demonstrates.

To some degree, it could be argued that the fundamentalists have resisted a move towards the academy, because the academy has moved towards them, with many of those who act as the public face of the humanities adopting hypercritical positions on the state of the world, which are often indistinguishable from those of the fundamentalists. John Gray, for example, writing a book in which he claims to explain away fundamentalist movements as just another expression of a thanatotic modernity, states, in a surprising echo of Wiekhart's claim that without Darwinism there might have been no Holocaust:

Without doubt 'racial science' opened the way for the Nazis' supreme crime. The theory that humanity was divided into distinct racial groups that ought not to intermarry gave the imprimatur of reason to fantasies of pollution. The idea that these groups were innately unequal sanctioned the enslavement of those deemed to belong on the lower rungs of the hierarchy. Without the construction of race as a scientific category, the project of annihilating European Jewry could scarcely have been formulated ...<sup>101</sup>

However to some degree this simply makes the fundamentalist refusal to engage with the humanities more striking and less explicable. If even John Gray thinks that nazism was a result of 'racial science', which to the fundamentalist mind means Darwinism, then is there really anything left to say in defense of Darwin? The answer here, at least in part, is the question of 'authority'. To some degree this has already been discussed above in the interrogation of fundamentalist ideas of truth, as in many ways, the primacy of divine law is the ultimate argument from authority. However, it is worth seeing how this concept manifests itself in concrete and temporal terms, and how such conceptions are expressed.

### **No Authorities, only Experts: The argument(s) from (counter)authority.**

The late Carl Sagan noted that one of the great commandments of science is, 'Mistrust arguments from authority',<sup>102</sup> and, in theory at least "... in science there are no authorities; at most, there are experts."<sup>103</sup> Despite the somewhat limited context of this remark, it does seem that in his rather off-the-cuff style, Sagan has actually articulated

<sup>101</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass*. pp. 63-64.

<sup>102</sup> Carl Sagan. *The Demon-Haunted world*. p.31.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p.197.

one of the very few, entirely unique and novel features of the modern world. In past eras, owing largely to the near-universal lack of education and literacy, all power came from, and was vested in authority rather than expertise. A pope or prince, king or priest was still considered, in an odd way, to know everything simply by virtue of the privileged relationship with God, which their position granted them. However, with the Enlightenment, came the idea that expertise was a more reliable system than brute authority. This view is well expressed in Thomas Paine's argument that the idea of a hereditary ruler is as absurd as the idea of a hereditary mathematician.<sup>104</sup>

For the most part, this distinction has won the day, to such an extent that in the secular areas of the modern world, the claim that there are no authorities, only experts, seem to be unconsciously acknowledged and accepted, so much so that we hardly ever think about it. If we have a sinus problem, we go to an otolaryngologist; if we have a cancer, we put our trust in oncology. This may seem obvious, but it marks an important shift in thinking, as we now understand that even the cleverest people with the best training simply cannot know everything there is to know. Such a seemingly simple notion is, in fact, the fatal blow to the primacy of authority.

Fundamentalists however, reject this distinction in favor of a chauvinistic and often explicit insistence on the primacy of authority, either scriptural, religious or secular, leaving them in a world where there are no experts, only authorities. Again this may seem self-evident, since as we have seen earlier, all fundamentalist thought is based, in the final accounting, on the belief that if facts challenge the authority of divine law, then it is the facts that must be wrong.

However, as an instructive example of not only the primacy of authority, but also the rejection of expertise, it is worth considering the 1999 book *In Six Days: Why 50 Scientists Choose to Believe in Creation*. The book is arranged, as the sub-title suggests, as short essays written by fifty "scientists" who believe in a literal six-day creation. While this may seem like a plausible attempt to gain scientific credibility, the credibility sought, comes in fact solely from the authority of science, with apparently no understanding that this is, or even might be, a matter where expertise

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<sup>104</sup> Christopher Hitchens. *Thomas Paine's Rights of Man: A Biography*. p.17.

might be important. As such, listed among the scientists, all of whom are effusively credentialed, we find mechanical, electrical and architectural engineers, mathematicians, horticultural scientists, medical doctors, meteorologists, orthodontists, and forestry researchers.<sup>105</sup> The fact that these specialties provide the writers with no expertise on matters of, for example, the age of the earth, the emergence of life, or the truth or falsity of evolution seems literally to have never occurred to the editor. Furthermore, for all its incompetent attempts to array itself in the glory of science, the scientists in question still base their arguments largely on scripture. As John P. Marcus, a biochemist at the University of Queensland puts it: “My belief in a literal six-day creation of the Universe is based primarily on the teaching of the Bible and my understanding that this is God’s word and is true.”<sup>106</sup>

Given the dominance of authority in fundamentalist thinking, it seems that while the fundamentalist engagement with science is ultimately one of rejection masquerading as acceptance, the masquerade is itself a tacit acceptance of the authority of science. Fundamentalists may view almost all scientists as either idiotic or corrupt, but they still respect the authority, title and titles of science. They may reject both science’s findings and methods, but they envy its authority and utility, as demonstrated by their continued quixotic attempts to turn science to their own ends.

Conversely, the fundamentalist’s engagement with the humanities is one of rejection masquerading as contempt, as, to the fundamentalist, the humanities, despite their (albeit unintentional) willingness to provide some intellectual credibility, have not only *no* authority, but, in many ways, *negative* authority, owing to their lack of piety. D’Souza, for example, asserts that secular teachers are interested in nothing so much as destroying the traditional beliefs of their students. To support his claim, he quotes Richard Rorty as saying that atheist educators and professors seek to discredit parents in the eyes of their children, to strip believers of their dignity, and to make religion seem “silly rather than discussable.”<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> John F. Ashton (ed). *In Six Days: why 50 Scientists Choice to Believe in Creation*. Contents.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. p.157.

<sup>107</sup> Dinesh D’Souza. *What’s So Great About Christianity*. p.33.

There is, D'Souza warns, no way to forearm or even forewarn children against this, as professors will not seek to destroy faith through argument or debate, but will take advantage of the student's eagerness to be an "... educated Harvard man or Stanford woman...", to trick him or her into dismissing all that their parents taught them as unfashionable, unenlightened simplistic and unsophisticated. As if this were not threatening enough, D'Souza warns of a 'second strategy', which seeks to use the power of adolescent sexuality to promote atheism. Godless professors, D'Souza insists, promote atheism"... as a means for young people to liberate themselves from moral constraint and indulge their appetites. Religion, in this framework, is portrayed as a form of sexual repression ..."<sup>108</sup>

D'Souza does draw the line short of accusing atheist academics of doing this to fulfill their own pudendal urges, and attributes it instead to an "... ideologically motivated attack on religion and traditional morality." However the results are the same, as D'Souza laments:

The story of how young people move from a childhood of innocence and piety to a questioning, sexually liberated and finally cynical adolescence is now a familiar one in Western culture ... Religion and morality are either excluded from consideration or treated with presumptive disdain.<sup>109</sup>

While this might seem to display an irrational, prurient, paranoid and proudly anti-intellectual mind-set so often ascribed to fundamentalists, it can be argued that D'Souza is actually correct in one important sense: namely that fundamentalists have every reason to be afraid of the humanities.

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<sup>108</sup> Dinesh D'Souza. *What's So Great About Christianity*. p.33.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Lessons of History**

The charm of history and its enigmatic lesson consist in the fact that, from age to age, nothing changes and yet everything is completely different. – Aldous Huxley

If there is one thing everybody thinks they know about the Holocaust, it is that it was a uniquely modern event, without precedent, and displaying within it all that is wrong with the modern world. Of course, there are very good reasons and many admirable proponents of such an idea, however to some degree the theory seems to be unraveling. The problem is that mid-twentieth century Holocaust scholarship, was in many ways a scholarship of existential terror, often - as in the case of Zygmunt Bauman - for good personal reasons. The inescapable question, the question on which all hope rested, was how to explain how apparently normal people could have committed the brutal crimes they so obviously had committed, in such a way as to prevent such crimes from being committed again.

However, this investigation was held in tension with the need to believe that the prevention of such a horror was possible. This in turn, logically necessitates a rejection of the notion that people are simply essentially bigoted, sadistic, cruel and murderous with a pathological and psychotic predisposition to brutal atrocity and eliminationist cruelty lying barely restrained, rendering the possibility of another Holocaust inevitable. As such, the whole project rested on finding some way in which the horrors of the twentieth century could be made aberrant and unique and thus to some degree, absolve the human race.

Since the most obvious, and possibly only unique feature of the modern world, is its industrialized modernity, modernity itself became viewed as the problem. However, simply arguing that the march of progress had given us the terrifying ability to enact our every genocidal fancy, does nothing to rehabilitate humanity and, in effect simply damns science and modernity for giving us a power with which we are too cruel and stupid to be trusted. Thus the fault remains firmly with us. As such, the need arose to remove the cause of catastrophe from base and basic human savagery. Consequently,



it became necessary to propose what, in some sense, amounted to a metaphysical critique of modernity as a time of man enslaved to the rhythms of machines and production and pennies-a-pound, a time in which the steady march of dehumanizing industrialization and immoral rationalization birthed a new world in which the weak were despised for their weakness, and victims for their victim-hood, and which through murderous collectivist logic that the desires of the many outweigh the rights of the few, expunged from the human soul any concern for the plight of others. It was a time, which, as Allen Ginsberg might have put it, “frightened man out of his natural ecstasy;”<sup>110</sup> a time, in short, which pushed reason to such extremes, it became murderous madness. To a large degree, all this true, but unfortunately, not uniquely so.

### ***Novel Bigotry:***

#### **The debatable history of racism.**

One of the more obvious questions here is, just how true is the claim that racism as we know it is actually modern? Is modern racism substantively, or simply stylistically modern, and if unique, what role had this novel bigotry in the genocides of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? To some degree these questions are simply ignored, or treated as though they have already been answered. John Gray puts it thus:

...while anti-Semitism has ancient Christian roots, the project of exterminating Jews is modern. If the Holocaust required modern technology and the modern state in order to be executed, it also required the modern idea of race to be conceived ...<sup>111</sup>

However, what is most notable about this claim is that Gray makes no actual attempt to explain why or how the Holocaust could not have been formulated without the aid of racial, as opposed to, say, religious theories, and simply repeats the charge.

However, regardless of how many times this claim might be made, it remains far from self-evident or even obviously true that without racial science the Holocaust would have been unthinkable. Firstly, such an argument ignores the fact that, as Patrick B. Sharp notes, it was not only scientists who “... proposed explanations for racial

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<sup>110</sup> Allen Ginsberg. *Howl and Other Poems*. p. 22.

<sup>111</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass*. p. 64.

“inferiority” that was presumed to be inherent ...”<sup>112</sup> but also “... authors, ministers and intellectuals ...”<sup>113</sup>

Racial theories popular ... before the late nineteenth century ... had little to do with science, emphasizing instead interpretations of the Bible to find a religious justification for treating blacks as either slaves ... One popular argument was based on the biblical story of Ham, the son of Noah, whom God cursed along with his descendants into a life of servitude. ... this ‘sons of Ham’ argument was an important part of a larger justification of slavery as ‘a beneficent institution’ that enacted ‘part of God’s plan to elevate a degraded race by introducing it to civilization and Christianity...’<sup>114</sup>

Of course one could argue that ‘racial science’ provided a far more nuanced and specific schema for racial differentiation and classification. However, while this may be true, it does not change the fact that the sons of Ham argument, as unsophisticated as it was, still provided an, albeit basic metric of racial inferiority and supremacy.

Secondly, Gray willfully ignores the fact, noted by Hannah Arendt, that notions of scientifically-justified racism did not gain any real degree of public support outside of the “utilitarian anti-colonial parties of England” - who believed racial theory held the key to eternal and equitable peace - until the 1880s<sup>115</sup>, by which time the old ways of thinking had already proved more than adequate to justify three centuries of slavery, colonialism and the dispossession and genocide of the native peoples of the Americas, the Pacific and Australasia.

It is also worth noting that, as Alan Dershowitz points out, the ‘project of annihilating European Jewry’ was not first expressed by a racial ‘scientist,’ Darwinian or not, nor Hitler himself, or even a modern anti-Semite, but by Martin Luther in the sixteenth century who:

After his efforts to convert the Jews failed ... begin to attack them ... as ‘disgusting vermin’ as well as ‘venomous and virulent.’ Towards the end of his life – and at the height of his influence – Luther articulated a specific program against the Jews which served as a Bible of anti-Jewish actions over the next four centuries, culminating in the Holocaust.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Patrick B. Sharp. *Savage Perils*. p. 20.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid. pp. 20-2.

<sup>115</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. p. 178.

<sup>116</sup> Alan Dershowitz. *Chutzpah*. p. 106.

Alan Dershowitz goes so far as to call Luther "... the spiritual predecessor of Adolf Hitler."<sup>117</sup> Nor does this seem to be overstating the case: in the eleventh chapter of his *On Jews and their Lies* (or at least that version available on *humanitas-international.org*) Luther declares that it is the sacred duty of all good Christians to terrorize Jews "... in honor of our Lord and of Christendom ..." <sup>118</sup> so as to prove to God that: "... we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of His Son and of His Christians ... if we ... were to protect and shield such a house for the Jews, existing right before our very nose, in which they lie about, blaspheme, curse, vilify and defame Christ and us ... it would be the same as if we were doing all this and even worse ourselves ..." <sup>119</sup>

To this end, Luther offers the 'sincere advice' that synagogues and Jewish houses and schools should be burnt, and then buried, with the Jews themselves forced to live together in a barn, so as to bring home to them "... the fact that they are not masters in our country, as they boast, but that they are living in exile and in captivity, as they incessantly wail and lament about us before God ..." From there, Luther advised that all prayer books and Talmudic writings from which "... idolatry, lies, cursing and blasphemy are taught," <sup>120</sup> should be confiscated and rabbis should be forbidden to teach "... on pain of loss of life and limb." Then all Jews should have their rights of safe-conduct on the highways abolished completely "For they have no business in the countryside." <sup>121</sup> Finally, Jews were to be forbidden from commerce and should have:

... all cash and treasure of silver and gold be taken from them and put aside for safekeeping. The reason for such a measure is that (they) ... have stolen and robbed from us all they possess ... For such evil gains are cursed if they are not put to use with God's blessing in a good and worthy cause. <sup>122</sup>

The fact that Luther's advice cleaves so closely to the laws enacted by the Nazis should not come as a surprise, as Hitler himself lists Luther along with Richard Wagner and Frederick the Great as archetypes of "the great protagonists" who:

... fight for their ideas and ideals despite the fact that they receive no recognition at the hands of their contemporaries. They are the men whose memories will be

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<sup>117</sup> Alan Dershowitz. *Chutzpah*. p.106.

<sup>118</sup> Martin Luther. "On Jews and their Lies" @ <http://www.humanitas-international.org/showcase/chronography/documents/luther-jews.htm>

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

enshrined in the hearts of the future generations ... Their lives and their work are then studied with touching and grateful admiration. Especially in dark days of distress, such men have the power of healing broken hearts and elevating the despairing spirit of a people.<sup>123</sup>

Of course, such an observation is countered by the claim that Luther's Jew-hatred, as noxious and repellent as it may be, was still fundamentally religious, and thus essentially different from the secular-racist anti-Semitism of the Nazis. However, the existence of this difference is, to some degree, simply assumed. Bauman's venerable claim, for example, that with the coming of the modern world, people became divided by, and into exclusively national identities which left no room for internationalism, and that in such a world, Jews became the enemy of all mankind and whose existence: "... defied the very truth on which all nations ... rested their claim ...".<sup>124</sup> seems deeply dubious. Bauman's assertion that the international and cosmopolitan culture of Jews made them, in a world "... tightly packed with nations...", a non-national void which could not be tolerated...<sup>125</sup>, simply presupposes that before the coming of the modern age and modern ideas of race, Jewishness was a purely theological category, based entirely on beliefs held, out of which one could opt.

However, such a contention is not easily proved. Even Hannah Arendt, on every other issue a towering paragon of scholarly rigor and indomitable common sense, is reduced to incoherent and contradictory dogmatism by the question of common ancestry between millennia of religiously-inspired Jew hatred and twentieth century anti-Semitism.

In *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt argues that pre-modern Jew-hatred and modern anti-Semitism are "... obviously not the same..."<sup>126</sup> and that any attempt to connect the two is "fallacious"<sup>127</sup> since anti-Semitism is "... a secular nineteenth century ideology which in name, though not in argument, was unknown before the 1870's..."<sup>128</sup> However half a page later, she contends that, in fact, anti-Semitism arose with the Enlightenment<sup>129</sup>. Arendt then declares that we cannot be sure about any of

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<sup>123</sup> Adolf Hitler. *Mein Kampf*. p. 171.

<sup>124</sup> Zygmunt Bauman. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. pp. 53-55.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. p. xi

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. p xii.

this, as all historical sources are unreliable owing to the rise of a Jewish obsession with “martyrology” in the thirteenth century which has “... given rise to an optical illusion under which both Jewish and non-Jewish historians have suffered ever since...”<sup>130</sup> and that “... a comprehensive history of anti-Semitism remains still to be written ...”<sup>131</sup> Arendt then disowns her own work as authoritative on the subject, noting that a history of anti-Semitism is: “beyond the scope of this book ...”<sup>132</sup> Finally, when forced to confront the issue head-on, she concedes with remarkable candor that her rejection of “an eternal anti-Semitism” is based on philosophical rather than factual grounds, since such a doctrine presupposes that:

... Jew hatred is a normal and natural reaction to which history gives only more or less opportunity ...” and thus (*sic*) “this doctrine ... gives the best possible alibi for all horrors. If it is true that mankind has insisted on murdering Jews for more than two thousand years, then Jew-killing is a normal, and even human occupation and Jew-hatred is justified beyond the need of argument.”<sup>133</sup>

### ***Homo Homini Lupus***

Man has always been, as the old saw has it, “*homo homini lupus*”, that is, a wolf to other men. The base ideological mechanics of mass-killing seem to have remained much the same for all of human history. As Alexander Hinton observes:

Genocides are distinguished by a process of ‘othering’ in which the boundaries of an imagined community are reshaped in such a way that a previously ‘included’ group (albeit often included only tangentially) is ideologically recast (almost always in dehumanizing rhetoric) as being outside the community, as a threatening and dangerous ‘other’ – whether racial, political, ethnic, religious, economic and so on – that must be annihilated.<sup>134</sup>

As such, to some degree, it appears that Arendt’s concern over the question of the eternal anti-Semite, does not necessarily arise, as taking Hinton seriously, the explanation for European and Christian anti-Semitism is not so much one of there being some curious feature of Judaism that makes it unusually prone to inspire hatred, or that there is something about Europeans or Christians that makes them unusually prone to murderous Jew-hatred, but rather, and simply that Jews have been the perennial, and most readily identifiable out-group of European history.<sup>135</sup> It is worth noting, for example, that during the Black Plague, when most European countries were whipping themselves into killing rages with paranoid fanaticism about Jews

<sup>130</sup> Hannah Arendt. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. p.xiii,

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p.xv.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.* p. 7.

<sup>134</sup> Alexander Hinton (ed). *Annihilating Difference*. p. 6.

<sup>135</sup> Yuri Slezkine. *Jewish Century*. Introduction.

poisoning wells,<sup>136</sup> and massacring entire Jewish communities,<sup>137</sup> the English, who had no Jewish communities as a result of the expulsions of 1290, spread the same stories about the Flemish and massacred their communities instead.<sup>138</sup>

With this in mind, it would be reasonable to assume, that even if the language and tactics of bigotry have changed, the basic ‘logic’ and mechanics have remained immutably the same. Sadly, to a large degree, the language and tactics have also not changed. To look at history, is to find that there is almost nothing unique in the terms and notions that produced the great crimes of the twentieth century. There seems, for example, very little difference between the notions of race espoused by the Nazis and those used by the Spanish Inquisition in its persecution of Christians of Jewish decent.

Following the explosion of pogroms that raced through Spain in 1391, killing four thousand Jews in Seville alone,<sup>139</sup> the Jews of Spain were given the choice in effect, between conversion and death.<sup>140</sup> While this may seem to be the perfect example of the perception of Jewishness as a purely religious category, what followed put the lie to any such contention. The newly baptised Jews were called not simply Christian, but rather *Conversos* and this title was passed down the line, applied not just to the one who had converted but also to the convert’s descendants.<sup>141</sup>

This distinction seems a very strong indication indeed that there was already some sense in which Jewishness was considered a racial, or at least ethnic or cultural category, out of which one could not move. This suggestion is ironically confirmed by the very law that proclaimed the *Conversos*’ new status, and which granted *Conversos* the right to freely intermarry with Christians of “pure blood”.<sup>142</sup> This apparently benign concept would grow into a paranoiac cult and then into a program of persecution, strikingly similar to that of that Nazis. First, (as later in Germany) came the spread of wild accusations that the *Conversos* made up a secretive conspiracy bent

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<sup>136</sup> Edward H. Flannery. *The Anguish of the Jews*. p. 109.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid. pp 109-111.

<sup>138</sup> Nigel Saul. *The Oxford Illustrated History of Medieval England*. pp 163-165.

<sup>139</sup> James Reston, Jr. *Dogs of God*. p. 17.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid

<sup>141</sup> Ibid. James Reston, Jr. *Dogs of God*. p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> Toby Green. *Inquisition: the Reign of Fear*. p. 196.

on oppressing and subverting Christianity.<sup>143</sup> Then, again as in Nazi Germany, came the pogroms, most notable in Toledo in 1449, and once calm had returned, came a law barring from public office anyone who "... could not prove their cleanliness of blood – that is, an absence of Jewish ancestry ..."<sup>144</sup>

Again, as in Nazi Germany, Jews were slowly yet systematically excluded from civil society and the professions, beginning in 1482, with the town of Guipuzcoa banning *Conversos* from living amongst them. The ban enacted by the stone masons of Toledo forbidding the discussion of trade secrets with *Conversos*, preceded similar bans by the Jeromites, the Dominicans and the Franciscans, and ended finally in a statute of Philip II, in 1555 which proclaimed that an ability to prove blood purity was necessary in order to hold any office in Spain. In praising the statute, Archbishop Siliceo declared with sentiments which would not have seemed out of place in *Mein Kampf*, that:

If a horse trader is offered an imperfect horse, even as a gift, he won't accept it in his herd, because what is most important to him is the race of the animal. This is his principle preoccupation, even if he thinks the horse is of a noble race. However, when one deals with the dark race of the *Conversos*, there are those who wish to admit them into the best post ... even when their lips are still wet with the perversions of their ancestors.<sup>145</sup>

Of course, there was still a highly-charged religious aspect to these persecutions, with the persecutions streaming from a widely-held suspicion as to the sincerity of the *Conversos'* conversion. However, here again, such a view only makes sense against a background in which Jewishness is already considered an immutable cultural or racial classification. The idea that the Jews, though Christian, were still Jewish, is an obvious nonsense, so long as 'Christian' and 'Jew' are terms that refer only to belief.

This is the point at which the claim of the unique modernity of racism becomes tautological, as rather than accept that this outburst of violent ethnic cleansing in fifteenth century Spain is proof of racism existing independent of modernity, the argument simply redraws the boundaries and argue that modern racism, and therefore modernity developed earlier than one might otherwise have thought.<sup>146</sup> This is

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<sup>143</sup> Toby Green. *Inquisition: the Reign of Fear*. p. 196.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid p. 197

<sup>146</sup> Ibid.

actually easier than it might look, since as Alexander Hinton notes, modernity is “... notoriously difficult to define...”<sup>147</sup> and is thus almost infinitely elastic, the concept allows itself to be stretched to cover almost anything.

As such, Toby Green compares the “modern’ racism leading up to the Inquisition to a golden age of ‘pre-modern’ tolerance which followed the re-establishment of Christian power in Spain. However, this is in large measure to conflate an inability to establish racist policy with a lack of racism. The newly-minted Christian Spain of the thirteenth century was simply in no position to engage in widespread campaigns of ethnic oppression, for the simple reason that half the population was still either Moorish or Jewish, and thus any attempt to whip up racial hatred could have only served to destabilize the region and thus weaken Christian Spain in its ongoing war with the Muslims who still held the sizeable beachheads of Granada and Cadiz.<sup>148</sup>

Furthermore, as Henry Kamen notes, Jews, though a tiny minority, represented almost the entire administrative class, as Christians refused to learn Arabic, and the Arabs refused to learn Spanish, meaning that, in essence all the records, documents and laws of Moorish Spain, most importantly those relating to the raising of taxes, were in a language none of the Spanish ruling classes could read.<sup>149</sup> Thus, any degree of legal or administrative continuity between the old regime and the new, relied almost entirely on the work of multi-lingual Jews, who could read the old records. As such, an immediate extirpation of Spanish Jewry would have made the state ungovernable.

This multi-lingualism also made Jews massively over-represented in the medical field, as again, all the medical texts were in Arabic.<sup>150</sup> With this in mind, many of the initiatives which are considered shining examples of the tolerance and enlightenment of the early kings of neo-Christian Spain, for example the program launched by Castilian King Alfonso X to translate all documents into Latin, might just as well be viewed as a sinister attempt to make the Jews disposable, and thus clear the way for their ultimate removal. There is, in fact, good reason to suspect that Alfonso might have simply been biding his time, as the legal code he produced, which in theory

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<sup>147</sup> Alexander Hinton, (ed). *Annihilating Difference*. pp. 7-8.

<sup>148</sup> James Reston, Jr. *Dogs of God*. p. 4.

<sup>149</sup> Henry Kamen. *The Spanish Inquisition, an Historical Revision*. p. 11.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*.



enshrined this spirit of tolerance, also declared that Jews were children of the Antichrist, "... helpmates of the Devil, and the prime villains in the last days of the coming apocalypse."<sup>151</sup>

Whether it was pre-meditated or not, the fortunes of the Jews of Christian Spain declined with their utility. When both disproportionately useful and necessary, the Jews of Spain were allowed to be both Jewish and Spanish; once they had become disproportionately useful but no longer necessary, they were allowed to be Spanish but not Jewish; and once they had lost their unique utility, they were allowed to be neither.

Likewise, to take this argument further, we must conclude that it is no simple accident of history that explicit European racism appears to have emerged only once Europeans were able to deal from a position of power with "non-Europeans", any more than it is a simply coincidence that every recorded act of genocide was committed by a strong majority against a weak minority. To argue that Europeans only became racist once they had risen to the position of global power through the technological and military superiority made possible through the modern innovations of science and the organization of the nation state, may prove that European racism is inherently modern, but it is also, in essence, to argue that Europeans became racist only when faced with defenseless populations of 'non-Europeans' against whom they could be safely racist.

The vast majority of Europeans in the millennium and a half between the fall of the Roman empire and the rise of the European empires had been so isolated, insulated and backwards, as to have no opportunity for racism, as they had either no contact with the non-European world, were forced into contact as the defensive party in the face of conquering foreign empires, or justified their own aggression under the flag of holy and divinely-sanctioned war against enemies who axiomatically became defined primarily as theologically-heterodox enemies of God.

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<sup>151</sup> James Reston, Jr. *Dogs of God, Columbus, the Inquisition and the Defeat of the Moors.* p. 6.

As such, we must be very careful not to construe an absence of evidence for pre-modern European racism, with evidence for the absence of pre-modern European racism. This is especially vital, given that almost any act of medieval European slaughter or conquest was justified by often very flimsy religious pretexts. The Norman conquest of Saxon Britain, for example, while appearing to us as an obviously ethnic and non-sectarian conflict, since both sides were equally Christian, the same kind of Christian and recognized the unquestioned spiritual authority of Rome, was in fact blessed by Pope Alexander II as a divine punishment for the "...disciplinary irregularities of the Anglo-Saxon Church."<sup>152</sup>

Thus there seems good reason to assume that even in the eleventh century, notions "of the other" were grounded as much in racial and cultural differences, as in religious differences. The ongoing war between the Greek and Latin churches, for example, marked by the massacre of up to 60,000 Latin Christians by the Greek church in 1182<sup>153</sup> and ending in the sacking of Constantinople by the fourth crusade in 1204<sup>154</sup>, seems to suggest that not being European, or perhaps more to the point, not being the right kind of European was as surely a sign of otherness as not being Christian.

### ***Crossing Over Jordan: Religion and genocide***

However, a deeper problem with the arguments of Bauman and Gray is that they carry within them the implicit assumption that genocide is only genocidal when motivated by racism, which is not only prejudicial, for the reasons discussed above, but is also so sharply at odds with the known history of genocide as to make one suspect it was inserted into the formulation simply as a obscurantist rhetorical trick. History is, of course, filled to overflowing with religiously-motivated attempts to suppress heterodox religious beliefs by murdering all those who held them. The shadowy figure of M.D. Aletheia<sup>155</sup> provides an interesting example here, as writing in 1897 he (or possibly she) was obviously unaware of the horrors that the twentieth century would unleash, and the debates which would follow about the necessity of modern

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<sup>152</sup> Geoffrey Hindley. *The Crusades: a History of Armed Pilgrimage and Holy War*. p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> Robert Fossier & Janet Sondheimer, *The Cambridge Illustrated History of the Middle Ages: 950-1250*. pp 506-508.

<sup>154</sup> Geoffrey Hindley. *The Crusades: a History of Armed Pilgrimage and Holy War*. p. 154.

<sup>155</sup> Nothing appears to be known about just who M.D. Aletheia actually was, partly owing to the use of the pseudonym. All that can be claimed with anything approaching certainty is that someone, or possibly a group of people writing under the name, wrote the Rationalist's Manual, and that the Manual was first published in America in 1897.

notions of race in justifying such slaughter, and yet still enumerates the “victims sacrificed on the altars of the Christian Moloch” as:

... 1,000,000 perished during the early Arian schism; 1,000,000 during the Carthaginian struggle; 7,000,000 during the Saracen slaughters. In Spain, 5,000,000 perished during the eight crusades; 2,000,000 of Saxons and Scandinavians lost their lives in opposing the introduction of the blessings of Christianity. 1,000,000 were destroyed in the Holy Wars against the Netherlands, Albigenses, Waldenses, and Huguenots ...<sup>156</sup>

While Aletheia’s numbers are almost certainly fraudulent and overblown, the basic point that religious difference is as potent a force as notions of race in the driving of genocide is still one that cannot be ignored. Anthony Smith, for example, in his study of genocide and ethnic conflict, found six foundations of ethnic identity, which seem necessary to the production of ethnic conflict. However, these foundations: a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, an association with a specific ‘single homeland’, and a sense of solidarity,<sup>157</sup> could apply just as convincingly to religious as to ethnic groups. Nor is this simply theoretical: as the sixteenth century dawned, the good Christians of Europe had already unleashed, what David Stannard called “... far and away, the most massive act of genocide in the history of the world upon the native peoples of the New World.”<sup>158</sup> As Stannard notes, within twenty-one years of Columbus first landing in the Caribbean, 8,000,000 people had been killed, the equivalent of “...more than fifty Hiroshimas...”<sup>159</sup> and the killing had only just started.

Within no more than a handful of generations following their first encounters with Europeans, the vast majority of the Western Hemisphere’s native peoples had been exterminated ... for every twenty natives alive at the moment of European contact ... only one stood in their place when the bloodbath was over.<sup>160</sup>

Stannard notes that one of the reason it has taken the genocide of the Native Americans so long to make it into the history books is that, the scale of death quite literally beggared belief, and that historical demographers who found “...post-Columbian depopulation rates of between 90 and 98 percent...”<sup>161</sup> naturally assumed

<sup>156</sup> M. D. Aletheia. *The Rationalist's Manual*. p. 123.

<sup>157</sup> Anthony D. Smith. *National Identity*. p. 21.

<sup>158</sup> David Stannard. *American Holocaust*. p. x.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

they were looking at some isolated catastrophe. However, as similar numbers were found with such regularity that finally evidence outweighed skepticism and “... an overall decline of 95 percent has become a working rule of thumb.”<sup>162</sup>

... To put this in a contemporary context, the ratio of native survivorship in the Americas following European contact was less than half of what the human survivorship ratio would be in the United States today if every single white person and every single black person died.<sup>163</sup>

Nor does Stannard seem to be overstating the case. The American history university text book, *Liberty, Equality and Power*, for example states that:

When Cortes arrived in 1519, the Indian population of Mexico probably exceeded 15 million. In the 1620's after waves of killing ... it bottomed out at 700,000 ... Peru suffered nearly as horribly. Its population fell from about 10 million in 1525 to 600,000 a century later. For the hemisphere as a whole, any given region probably lost 90 to 95 percent of its population ... in some of these places, all the Indians died.<sup>164</sup>

Nor was this depopulation a simple effect of genocidal absent-mindedness. A conscious and systematic program of disposition and genocide seems to have emerged as soon as Columbus set foot in the New World. One of the more repellent ironies of the Spanish genocide was that in order to give their depredations the aura of legitimacy, the perpetrators were ordered to read a statement to any Indians they intended to rape and enslave or murder, declaring that:

I certify to you that, with the help of God, we shall powerfully enter into your country and shall make war against you in all ways and manners that we can, and shall subject you to the yoke and obedience of the Church and of Their Highnesses. We shall take you and your wives and your children, and shall make slaves of them, and as such shall sell and dispose of them as Their Highnesses may command. And we shall take your goods, and shall do you all the mischief and damage that we can, as to vassals who do not obey and refuse to receive their lord and resist and contradict him.<sup>165</sup>

Of course the Indians, not speaking Spanish, could have had no idea what was being said and could not have complied if they had wanted to, which ultimately did not matter since the Spanish “... did not wait for the Indians to reply to their demands.”<sup>166</sup> As if to remove any lingering ambiguity about the nature of this contact, from the very beginning, Columbus sent out his forces. “... accompanied by ferocious armored dogs that had been trained to kill and disembowel, they preyed on the local communities - already plague-enfeebled - forcing them to supply food and women

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<sup>162</sup> David Stannard. *American Holocaust*. p. x.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> John M. Murrin, et al. *Liberty, Equality and Power*. p. 38.

<sup>165</sup> David Stannard. *American Holocaust*. p. 66.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

and slaves, and whatever else the soldiers might desire ... The troops went wild, stealing, killing, raping, and torturing natives, trying to force them to divulge the whereabouts of the imagined treasure-houses of gold.”<sup>167</sup>

It is also worth noting that while the epidemic diseases introduced by the Spanish were unquestionably the most lethal factor in the depopulation of the Americas, the epidemics cannot, in any reasonable estimation, be counted as a simple unintended consequence of contact, as knowingly or not, the spread of sickness seems to have been direct result of Columbus’ enthusiastic use of sadistic violence. The policy of rape is an obvious factor in the spread of microbes, as no doubt, was the famine caused by Indians abandoning their crops in their desperate flight from the advancing Spanish<sup>168</sup>, but there were also less obvious factors. As the missionary Bartolome de Las Casas recalled, the Spanish invaders sought a policy that was as Les Casas put it:

... not just cruel, but extraordinarily cruel so that harsh and bitter treatment would prevent Indians from daring to think of themselves as human beings or having a minute to think at all ...<sup>169</sup>

To this end, the Spanish adopted the habit of freeing one of their tortured, but still-surviving prisoners with orders to “Go now, spread the news to your chiefs.”<sup>170</sup> The freeing of an, in all probability, infected and highly-contagious prisoner with orders to seek out other groups, was almost certainly a factor in the wildfire spread of the Europeans’ sickness.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the genocide of the Native Americans was not simply, or solely the murderous work adventurers and sadists who just happened to be nominally Christian. In fact, one of the more shocking aspects of what Stannard calls the American Holocaust was just how active and murderous a part was played by missionaries, monks and men of the cloth, and how totally their genocide was not only justified by their faith, but was actually motivated by a seemingly sincere, if utterly perverted concern for heathen souls. As *Liberty, Equality and Power* puts it:

The Franciscans – in Europe, the gentlest of Catholic religious orders – brutally and systematically tortured their Mayan converts ... whenever they caught them

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<sup>167</sup> David Stannard. *American Holocaust*. p. 69.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid. p. 69.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. p 70.

worshipping their old Gods. To the Franciscans, the slightest lapse could signal a reversion to Satan-worship ... they dared not to be kind.<sup>171</sup>

This infernal conflation of sadism, blood lust and devout piety led to a revolting and tragic spectacle, made famous by Bertrand Russell, of missionaries:

... baptising Indian infants and ... then immediately dash their brains out: by this means they secured these infants went to Heaven. No orthodox Christian can find any logical reason for condemning their action, although all nowadays do so.<sup>172</sup>

Furthermore, although the American genocide was marked by "... the savage employment of non-technological instruments of destruction, such as the unleashing of trained and hungry dogs to devour infants, and the burning and crude hacking to death of the inhabitants of entire cities ..."<sup>173</sup>, Stannard contends that this slaughter set the stage for the "... the chilling utilization of technological instruments of destruction, such as gas chambers, and its assembly-line, bureaucratic, systematic methods of destruction ... of the Nazi Holocaust"<sup>174</sup> As Stannard notes, Hitler wrote approvingly in *Mein Kampf*, of the Catholic Church's "... tenacious adherence to dogma..." and its "... fanatical intolerance..." and most importantly that "...in 'building its own altar, Christianity had not hesitated to 'destroy the altars of the heathen.' ..." Hitler even went so far as to cite the Catholic Churches history as the model for his own dream of a triumphant Nazism. As Stannard puts it:

... it is worth noting also that the *Fuhrer* ... expressed admiration for the 'efficiency' of the American genocide campaign against the Indians, viewing it as a forerunner for his own plans and programs.<sup>175</sup>

Thus, the issue must be questioned, of just how indispensable are notions of race in the sustaining of conflict and eradicating difference through genocide. Likewise, so must the contention of whether purely traditional Christian anti-Semitism could have on its own produced the Holocaust. Even the argument that however dubious the connection between racial science and the Holocaust might be, the creation of Jewishness as a racial category was an indispensable tool for the bureaucratic categorization of those to be murdered, can, and must be questioned.

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<sup>171</sup> John M. Murrin, et al. *Liberty, Equality and Power*. p. 37.

<sup>172</sup> Bertrand Russell. *Why I Am Not a Christian*. p. 35.

<sup>173</sup> David Stannard. *American Holocaust*. p 151

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid. p. 153.

Under the Nuremberg laws, one needed all four grandparents to be “German” - which in effect meant Christian - in order to be considered of German blood. As such, an entirely workable administrative process had been set up reliant solely on each person’s ability to produce parish records proving their Christian provenance. Nor is this simply counter-factual conjecture. The Nazis relied very heavily on the genealogical records held by the Church, since they were by far the most complete records and thus provided the best possible means of tracing an individual’s possibly Jewish ancestry. As Guenther Lewy, wrote, even when it became clear that the price of being proved of Jewish stock was deportation and death:

The very question of whether the Church should lend its help to the Nazi state in sorting out people of Jewish descent was never debated. On the contrary, ‘We have always unselfishly worked for the people without regard to gratitude or ingratitude,’ a priest wrote in *Klerusblatt* ... ‘We shall also do our best to help in this service to the people.’<sup>176</sup>

Nor, for what it is worth, were the Nazis themselves quite the secular, scientific and shiny leather-clad nihilistic futurists so often presented. Hitler himself rejected evolution in favor of biological essentialism, which Darwin and to some degree Lamarck had overturned. Hitler, it seems, still believed that while changes might be bred into or out of a species, that species would always remain essentially and unalterably the same. As he wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

This urge for the maintenance of the unmixed breed, which is a phenomenon that prevails throughout the whole of the natural world, results not only in the sharply defined outward distinction between one species and another but also in the internal similarity of characteristic qualities which are peculiar to each breed or species. The fox remains always a fox, the goose remains a goose, and the tiger will retain the character of a tiger. The only difference that can exist within the species must be in the various degrees of structural strength and active power, in the intelligence, efficiency, endurance, etc., with which the individual specimens are endowed ...<sup>177</sup>

This fact seems widely accepted, although seldom mentioned, and is often airily dismissed by the claim that it is a trifling difference and that, though Hitler may not have quite grasped the details and nuances of Darwin’s theory, he was still clearly influenced by Darwin. However this argument suffers from an important problem, namely that the notion of what is called microevolution - or the belief, expressed by Hitler, that while evolution does produce minor differences between individuals

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<sup>176</sup> Guenther Lewy. *The Catholic Church and Nazi Germany*. p. 282.

<sup>177</sup> Adolf Hitler. *Mein Kampf*. p. 223.

within a species, the species is itself set within immutable boundaries which prevent one species ever evolving into another.<sup>178</sup> It is a tiny nuanced difference found in competing interpretations of Darwin, but is in fact, a matter of the most basic of Darwinian principles. Darwin's breakthrough was not the observation that offspring often inherit the traits of their parents, or even that over time, significant variations could arise within a species. Both of these phenomena had been accepted through hundreds and in some sense, thousands of years before Darwin. Rather, Darwin's innovation was the observation that, over enough time, these mechanisms would produce an accumulation of variation so significant as to make a new species. Without the observation that all species have evolved from previous species, and are in the process of evolving into new species - which Hitler rejected - you do not have evolution at all, but rather, and simply, selective breeding, an idea which had been practiced, if not always understood for (if recent finding on the domestication of the dog are to be trusted) three hundred centuries before Darwin was born.<sup>179</sup>

In this vein, the medical experiments carried out in the death camps which even Carl Sagan notes have become emblematic of what is seen as the perverse and sadistic scientism of the modern world<sup>180</sup> were neither as modern, nor rational or scientific as is often assumed, and were in fact, simply insane. As Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ipperman point out, most of the medical experimentation was motivated not by a post-enlightenment mania for knowledge, but by a desire to, among other things:

... scientifically validate the 'world ice teaching' or the belief that the 'Aryans' had arrived fully-formed from 'heaven', being preserved in 'eternal ice' before stalking the earth armed with superhuman 'electrical powers'. During the war, scientists working under the aegis of the 'Ahnenerbe's' Institute for Applied Military Research carried out lethal research on concentration camp inmates to evaluate human tolerance of high altitudes and prolonged immersion in freezing temperatures.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> It is worth noting that this view is the central thesis of Discovery Institute fellow Michael Behe's 2007 book, *The Edge of Evolution*, and has featured in the work of Discovery Institute founder Philip E Johnson and Senior Fellow Jonathan Wells, thus if anyone is to be named and shamed as the inheritors of Hitler's notions about the origins of life and race, it is ironically the people who paid Wiekart to write his book. See Michael Behe. *The Edge of Evolution*; Philip E Johnson. *Darwin on Trial*; and Jonathan Wells. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Darwinism and Intelligent Design*.

<sup>179</sup> MSNBC, "World's first dog lived 31,700 years ago" @ <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/27240370/>

<sup>180</sup> Carl Sagan. *The Demon-Haunted World*. p. 14.

<sup>181</sup> Michael Burleigh & Wolfgang Ippermann. *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*. pp. 64-65.



*The Tautology of Horror.*

With this in mind, it seems that the only reason the notion of the Holocaust as the signal, defining and most characteristic event of modernity has survived, is that it has, in many ways become tautological, at least in the sense that the theory dictates what we see when we look into that murderous abyss. Since, the theory maintains the Holocaust was a unique event, made possible and motivated by modernity, the key to understanding it lies in the modern nature of the genocide. This of course, cannot help but exaggerate the modernity of the Holocaust, and can, in extreme cases, actually serve as an unconscious form of revisionism, whereby facts that do not fit the hyper-real idealization of the Holocaust as the genocidal and industrial expression of a murderously materialistic, poisonously pragmatic, obscenely efficient and loathsomely logical modernity, are disregarded, while actions that confirm the theory - even when more apparent than actual - are embraced as automatically true. Perhaps the best example of this is Richard Rubinstein's claim that:

Every step in the methodical elimination of the Jews had to be planned and carried out in a thoroughly disciplined manner. Henceforth, there would be neither emotional outbursts nor improvisations. The same meticulous care that goes into the manufacture of ... a Mercedes was to be applied to the problem of eliminating the Jews ... Henceforth no brown-shirted bullies would assail them ... the chief of the party chancellery issued strict orders against the molestation of Jews as beneath the dignity of the Nazi Movement. "Law and order" prevailed ... The hoodlums were banished and the bureaucrats took over. Only then was it possible to contemplate the extermination of millions. A machinery was set up that was devoid of both love and hate.<sup>182</sup>

While this may sound well, it is also terrible misleading. The death camps may well appear at this distance to have been implacably impersonal industrial units for the dispassionate mass production of corpses, which they were, but the very efficiency of the death factories was built on a enthusiastically-erected foundation of joyously inflicted torture, ritualistic enforced sadism, all too redolent of the Spanish inquisition. The obfuscation of this fact is made all too obvious by the oft-asked question of why the Jews went so meekly to their deaths. As Hannah Arendt put it, while there is no immediately forthcoming answer to:

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<sup>182</sup> Richard L. Rubenstein. *The Cunning of History*. pp. 28-38.

... this cruel and silly question ... one could easily have found an answer had he permitted his imagination to dwell for a few minutes on the fate of those Dutch Jews who in 1941, in the old Jewish quarter of Amsterdam, dared to attack a German security police detachment. Four hundred and thirty Jews were arrested in reprisal and they were literally tortured to death, first in *Buchenwald* and then in the Austrian camp of *Mauthausen*. For months on end they died a thousand deaths, and every single one of them would have envied his brethren in *Auschwitz* and even in *Riga* and *Minsk*. There exist many things considerably worse than death, and the S.S. saw to it that none of them was ever very far from their victims' minds and imagination ... The glory of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto and the heroism of the few others who fought back lay precisely in their having refused the comparatively easy death the Nazis offered them - before the firing squad or in the gas chamber ... only the very young had been capable of taking "the decision that we cannot go and be slaughtered like sheep."<sup>183</sup>

Furthermore, there does seem to a very real possibility that the efficacy of the Final Solution, that one feature that seems on the face of it to render the Holocaust irredeemably modern, may have, in fact, been massively overstated. As Adam Jones notes, a refutation to the arguments of Bauman et al may be:

... summarized in one word: Rwanda ... There, about one million people were hunted, corralled, and exterminated in *twelve weeks* – a rate of killing exceeding by an order of magnitude that of the ‘modern’ Nazi holocausts. Yet, the genocide was carried out by men and women armed with little more than guns and agricultural implements. It involved no appreciable role for scientific or technical experts. And the killing was conducted face-to-face, intimately and publicly, with no resort to the physical and psychological distancing strategies and official secrecy supposedly necessary for ‘modern’ mass-slaughter. One may argue that the Rwandan holocaust depended on a complex administrative apparatus; a racist ideology tinged with pseudo science; and the industrial mass production of machetes, hoes, firearms, and grenades. But bureaucracy is an ancient phenomenon as successive Chinese dynasties remind us, and one suspects that the ideology of hate developed by Hutu Power would have been just as functional without its vaguely modernist overtones. Finally - with regard to the technology of death – guns, machetes and explosives all pre-date the industrial revolution.<sup>184</sup>

Furthermore, should there be any lingering doubt that there exists in the Rwandan genocide some uniquely modern variable that Jones has failed to take into account, it is worth considering the actions of the Timurlane of history and legend. In December of 1398, this Timur Lenk, in the middle of a campaign of conquest and slaughter, recorded under the modest title of *The Holy War Against the Infidels of Hindustán*, found himself at the gates of Delhi, where it was brought to his notice that they had taken more than 100,000 “infidels” and “Hindus prisoners”. Feeling that it would be entirely opposed to the rules of war to set “these idolaters and foes of Islám at

<sup>183</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. p. 12.

<sup>184</sup> Adam Jones. *Genocide: A Comprehensive History*. pp 290-291.

liberty.”<sup>185</sup> Timur Lenk concluded that in fact he had no choice but “... that of making them all food for the sword.”<sup>186</sup> To this end, Timur Lenk gave the order that “...that every man who had infidel prisoners was to put them to death, and whoever neglected to do so should himself be executed”<sup>187</sup> and a reward paid to the informer. The results were, as Timur Lenk himself put it:

When this order became known to the gházís of Islám, they drew their swords and put their prisoners to death. 100,000 infidels, impious idolaters, were on that day slain... After the whole of the vile idolaters had been sent to hell, I gave orders that one man out of every ten should be told off to guard the property, and cattle and horses<sup>188</sup>

Nor is this a willfully anachronistic, extraneous or inappropriate comparison of the relative efficiency with which occasions of mass murder can be carried out. As iconic as the death factories are, they in fact, make up - quite literally - only half of the history of the Holocaust. The other, and far less frequently discussed, half was simply a mass mob slaughter, indistinguishable, either stylistically or substantively – except in terms of sheer scale, scope and success – from the outbursts of pogrom and carnivalistic slaughter that have stained European streets with the blood of Jews at such regular intervals for so much of the last two thousand years. As Christopher Browning has so admirably demonstrated, the elimination of European Jewry was, in fact, to a large degree, handed over to brown-shirted bullies, most notoriously Reserve Police Battalion 101.

As Browning reveals, on the eve of the German invasion of Russia, the Nazis issued two orders which in effect, prearranged an ongoing series of pogroms. The first, the Commissar Order, ordered that “... all communists functionaries ... as well as those ... suspected of being in any way anti-German ... were to be ... executed ...”<sup>189</sup> The second order, the Barbarossa decree “... was, in fact, a ‘shooting license’ against Russian civilians ...”<sup>190</sup> issued to the men of the so called order police, declaring that the war was “... war against Jews and

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<sup>185</sup> H. M. Elliot (ed: John Dowson). *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians. The Muhammadan Period*, Vol 3. pp. 399-400.

<sup>186</sup> H. M. Elliot (ed: John Dowson). *The History of India, as Told by Its Own Historians. The Muhammadan Period*, Vol 3. pp. 399-400

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Christopher R. Browning. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. p. 11.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid

Bolsheviks and ... that the battalion should proceed ruthlessly against Jews ... regardless of age or sex ...”<sup>191</sup>

This new policy was inaugurated in the half-Jewish city *Bilalystok*, on the 27<sup>th</sup> June 1941 when the men of Police Battalion 309 were dispatched to comb the Jewish quarter and cease the city’s Jews and promptly started a pogrom, “beating, humiliation, beard burning, and shooting at will as the policeman drove Jews to the market place or synagogue.”<sup>192</sup> When a Jewish leaders appeared at the headquarters of the 221<sup>st</sup> Security Division of General Pflugbeil and knelt at his feet, begging for him to end the carnage, “... one member of Police Battalion 309 unzipped his fly and urinated on them while the general turned his back ...”<sup>193</sup> What started as a pogrom quickly turned into mass murder:

Jews collected at the marketplace were taken to a park, lined up against a wall and shot. The killing lasted until dark. At the synagogue, where at least 700 Jews had been collected, gasoline was poured at the entryways. A grenade was tossed into the building, igniting a fire. Police shot anyone trying to escape. The fire spread to nearby houses where Jews were hiding, and they too were burned alive. The next day, thirty wagonloads of corpses were taken to a mass grave.<sup>194</sup>

Nor was this just some anomalous breakdown in Nazi discipline, or some repulsive but ultimately unimportant reversion to uncalculated pre-modern and barbarous methods. As Adam Jones notes, in the months following the rape of Bilalystok, 1.2 million Jews were murdered in similar situations,<sup>195</sup> “... mostly by point-blank rifle fire.”<sup>196</sup> By the time the Germans were forced out of Russia by the Red Army, they had killed 3.3 million.<sup>197</sup> Furthermore, this most mass of murders relied largely on the cooperation of the rank and file German soldiery, as Jones notes, the relationship between the army - or *Wehrmacht* - and the murder squads were “... usually ‘excellent’ and in some instances ‘affectionate’ ... The generals ... often lent their own men, ordinary solders, to assist in the massacres. A great many ordinary solders ‘delighted in death as spectators or as perpetrators.’ As SS lieutenant- Colonel Karl Kretschmer wrote

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<sup>191</sup> Christopher R. Browning. *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. p. 11.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.* pp 11-12

<sup>195</sup> Adam Jones. *Genocide: A Comprehensive History*. p. 152.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

home in September 1942: ‘Here in Russia, wherever the German soldier is, no Jew remains.’<sup>198</sup>

With this in mind, it seems, that to a considerable degree the notion that the Holocaust was solely, or even primarily the work of godlessly modern scientists and bureaucrats, is factually insupportable and as such, there seems no real reason for, or grounds upon which it can be entirely separated from the almost two thousand years of European Jew-hatred which preceded it. Of course, such an argument may seem to be simply willful and present-centric historicism. However, given that the purpose here is to interrogate the past, so as to inform the present, a rejection of such historicism is both largely impossible and to a degree, undesirable. If we take the view that the past can only be read by its own standards, then by definition it becomes impossible to compare the events of disparate periods. Thus, the claim that, in the present context, the crimes of the modern world are uniquely modern becomes a simple and uninformative tautology, in which the present becomes incomparably wicked, simply because all possible comparisons have been disallowed.

### *The Myth of the Myth of Moral Progress*

Furthermore, such arguments often perform the remarkable trick of starting as syllogisms and ending up as self-contradictions. John Gray, for example, writing of the wicked futility of utopian thinking, rejects even the possibility of moral progress, stating that:

Believers in progress ... think ... improvement in society is cumulative ... so that the elimination of one evil can be followed by the removal of others in an open-ended process. But human affairs show no sign of being additive in this way: what is gained can always be lost, sometimes ... in the blink of an eye. Human knowledge tends to increase, but humans do not become more civilized as a result. They remain prone to every kind of barbarism, and while the growth of knowledge allows them to improve their material conditions, it also increases the savagery of their conflicts.<sup>199</sup>

As sophisticated and worldly-wise and weary as Gray seems to think such an argument is, one cannot help but notice that the argument is ultimately a badly-phrased and meaningless contradiction. If, as Gray claims, we are no more morally

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<sup>198</sup> Adam Jones. *Genocide: A Comprehensive History*. p. 152

<sup>199</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass*. p. 188.

advanced than anyone else who has ever lived, then, axiomatically, our powers of moral reasoning are stripped of any authority, or even reliability, since, according to the argument, we can no more trust our moral reasoning to be sound than we could trust the moral reasoning of the baby-murdering Franciscans. Thus, ultimately, we lose the ability to judge our own morality as either savage or civilized.

However, the fact that this argument would be self-evidently nonsensical has not prevented it from gaining popular currency. Terry Eagleton, for example, named by *The Independent* as "... Britain's most influential academic critic ...",<sup>200</sup> writes in his 2009 offering *Reason, Faith, and Revolution* that: "If ever there was a pious myth and a piece of credulous superstition, it is the belief that, a few hiccups apart, we are all steadily en route to a finer world."<sup>201</sup>

Eagleton's reasoning, such as it is, seems based on the notion that the corruption of the 'language of enlightenment' has brought us into a brave new world of "... corporate greed, the police state, a politically compromised science, and a permanent war economy ..." leading to a world notable only for "... the misery wreaked by racism and sexism, the sordid history of colonialism and imperialism, the generation of poverty and famine ..."<sup>202</sup>

Eagleton seems well pleased by the erudition of this argument, and convinced that his incorporation of racism, sexism, colonialism, imperialism, poverty and famine into the same declarative sentence proves his point beyond any debate. However, all his argument actually demonstrates is that Eagleton, like all of us, is hamstrung in attempting to think seriously about his own day by the simple fact of living within a cultural context informed and shaped by a history that all too often reflexively glorifies the past and condemns the present.

Eagleton, like Gray, and indeed all of us, are left with a hypercritical conception of the present, forever weighed against, and found wanting beside an uncritically romanticized view of the past. The middle ages, for example - which Eagleton wisely

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<sup>200</sup> Paul Vallyelly. "Terry Eagleton: Class warrior." 13 October 2007. @ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/profiles/terry-eagleton-class-warrior-396770.html>

<sup>201</sup> Terry Eagleton. *Reason, Faith, and Revolution*. p. 70.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

avoids mentioning - seem widely regarded as a simpler and less soulless time, filled with chivalrous knights, sensuously distressed damsels, pious princes and happy smiling peasants, bathing together in the warming light of Christ. As D'Souza writes:

Christianity found a continent that had already been laid waste. The 'Dark Ages' were the consequence of Roman decadence and barbarian pillage. Slowly and surely, Christianity took this backward continent and gave it learning and order, stability and dignity... Where there was once wasteland, they produced hamlets, then towns, and eventually commonwealths and cities. Through the years the savage barbarian warrior became a chivalric Christian knight, and new ideals of civility and manners and romance were formed that shape our society to this day. If Christianity had not been born out of Judaism ... we might still be living in the Dark Ages.<sup>203</sup>

D'Souza even brazenly argues that although this 'civilization' was built on the enforced servitude of serfs, this not only does not mar its beatific idyll. He argues that serfdom was a great moral leap forward, writing that:

Slavery, the foundation of Greek and Roman civilization, withered throughout medieval Christendom and was replaced by serfdom, which was not the same thing. While slaves were "human tools," serfs were human beings who had rights of marriage, contract, and property ownership that were legally enforceable. Medieval feudalism was based on a hierarchical system of reciprocal rights and duties between lords and serfs.<sup>204</sup>

However, while this technically true, it is also at best a distinction without a difference<sup>205</sup> and at worst a horrible, and probably intentionally misleading falsehood. In theory, a serf did indeed enjoy the protection of the law; however, in actuality the law came in the form of "... stern rights of jurisdiction and constraint, known collectively as the 'ban'," granted by the king to the landlords who entrusted the enforcement of the law to the landlord<sup>206</sup>. As if this system was not already heavily enough tilted in the landlord's favor, the law also denied the serf any legal rights against his landlord.<sup>207</sup> Thus to describe the feudal system as one of reciprocal rights and duties between lords and serfs, is a self-evident nonsense, as is the claim that peasants enjoyed any legally enforceable rights. In fact, in some sense, the law, such as it was, might be argued to have been worse than no law at all, since while the peasantry were denied any legal protection from the landlords, the landlords: "... armed with these fearsome legal powers ..." were "... able to sting their tenants for a good deal more than rent – for now there were fines and tolls to be imposed and any

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<sup>203</sup> Dinesh D'Souza. *What's So Great About Christianity*. p. 35.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid. p. 51.

<sup>205</sup> It is also worth noting that the word serf comes from the Latin *servus*, meaning slave. Elena Lourie, Harvey J. Hames. *Jews, Muslims, and Christians in and around the Crown of Aragon*. p. 114.

<sup>206</sup> Robert S. Hoyt, Stanley Chodorow. *Europe in the Middle Ages, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*. p. 263.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid. p. 261.

number of inventive dues exacted ...”<sup>208</sup>

Nor is this overstating the case: the sheer number of fines, tolls, taxes and services the serfs were obliged – on pain of death or at least mutilation – to render unto their lords, as laid out by Robert S. Hoyt and Stanley Chodorow, in their *Europe in the Middle Ages*, are truly staggering. For most of the year, peasants were forced to work three days out of the week on their lord’s personal land. During the harvest season, however, all the serf’s labour was demanded to harvest the landlord’s crops, and only once all was harvested were the serfs allowed to harvest their own crops. Peasants were also required to make hay for the lord’s animals, who were given free rein to graze on the peasant’s crops, while the peasants were required to pay small sums to graze their own animals on the land upon which they were already paying rent, as well as having to pay for the right to take water from streams or ponds. There were even special holy day taxes: at Easter, the serfs owed a dozen eggs to the lord, at Christmas, each peasant owed his lord one goose.

Furthermore, the lord still demanded extra payment for the few services he did provide. For example, since the lord owned the mill and the oven, the peasants were obliged to render a proportion of the flour ground and the bread baked, and they were prohibited from using any other mill or oven. Even the serfs’ personal lives were subject to harsh taxes: fees had to be paid to the lord in order to marry, failure to pay this tax was punishable by *Droit de Seigneur* (right of the first night) which gave the lord the legal right to rape the bride on the wedding night. Even dying meant the payment of a tax, as upon the death of a serf, the dead serf’s family had to pay a fee to the landlord to recompense for the dead serf’s lost labour. On top of this was the arbitrary tax called Tallage, or *Taille* (cut), which the lord could exact at will, in any amount and at any time.<sup>209</sup>

Nor, although the law gave the landlord all the power and privilege he would ever need, did the law actually matter overmuch, as, in fact the system was not based on law at all, but simply on: “... the force that the lord, as a member of the military and

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<sup>208</sup> Tom Holland. *Millennium: The End of the World and the Forging of Christendom*. p. 48.

<sup>209</sup> Robert S. Hoyt, Stanley Chodorow. *Europe in the Middle Age*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. pp. 259 – 263.



feudal aristocracy, could bring to bear on his peasants.”<sup>210</sup> As such, to put things in a modern context, the feudal system was simply a system of not only legalistic but also armed extortion.

Likewise, we should note that this was not a case of the landlords using their power and might to skim off the surplus production of their peasants, as, simply put, there was no surplus. Most peasants were in fact, sub-subsistence farmers, who even in times of good harvests were racked by food shortages, and sometimes outright famine every spring: “... when the supplies of winter were exhorated and the fruits of summer yet to bloom.”<sup>211</sup> Nor were good years common, as even when nature was kind, the peasantry was still endangered by the belief held by the perpetually feuding aristocracies, that the destruction of a rival landlord’s crops and serfs was a legitimate way to destroy his power base. Thus the ties to the landlord, which were meant to provide the protection for which all the taxes were paid, often did far more to imperil than protect. Also, of course, the taxes still had to be paid, even if nature or a neighboring lord’s knights had destroyed all means of paying such taxes.<sup>212</sup>

Against such facts, anyone wishing to draw a comparison between the evils of modernity and what came before, cannot help but conclude that the feudal system of the middle ages was every inch as cruel and inhuman and kafkaesque as any totalitarian state the twentieth century has produced, and did as much to sow misery, sickness, sorrow, despair and death as any of the collectivist follies of the modern world. In fact, even the worst, most cruel and savage of Stalin’s crimes, such as confiscating grain from starving peasants, or manufacturing famine to further political goals, would have been noteworthy in the middle ages only for its audacity and scope.

This leaves those who would deny the reality of moral progress or ethical evolution in an untenable ‘Catch 22’, as, to argue that such facts are irrelevant, since we cannot judge past ages by the morality of our time, is to tacitly admit the reality of moral progress, for if moral progress was simply an ignorant fancy, then all moral systems should be essentially the same and thus comparable. If, on the other hand, one seeks

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<sup>210</sup> Robert S. Hoyt, Stanley Chodorow. *Europe in the Middle Age*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. p. 263.

<sup>211</sup> Tom Holland. *Millennium: The End of the World and the Forging of Christendom*. p. 149.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid. pp. 149-153.

to argue that in fact, moral progress is illusionary, then the twentieth century can, and must be judged against what has come before. The modern world would have to answer for, to take an example, the horrors of Stalin's gulags. However, the fact that, as Hannah Arendt notes, those condemned to the gulags were not so much murdered, as abandoned and left to die, seems to demand that for consistency, we condemn the pre-modern world for the death of that every slave, serf, sailor, soldier, sepoy, convict, criminal, factory worker, navvy, coolie, prostitute, peasant, guttersnipe, chimney sweep, every inmate of a workhouse, goal or asylum, every orphan, beggar, match girl or miner who died prematurely due to the incompetence, criminality, or signal lack of compassion of their betters.

Less relevant than they might at first appear, are claims that the modern world is not better, but only different, in that while we may have emancipated our serfs and freed our slaves, we have also exported our oppression of labour into the sweat shops and extraction-based kleptocracies of the Third World. As Carl Sagan noted, in terms of life expectancy - which he argued is the best single measure of the physical quality of life, on the immensely sensible grounds that: "If you're dead, there's little you can do to be happy." - then the quality of human life has improved almost immeasurably in the last hundred and some years.

In hunter-gatherer, pre-agricultural times, the human life expectancy was about 20 to 30 years. That's also what it was in Western Europe in Late Roman and in Medieval times. It didn't rise to 40 years until around the year 1870. It reached 50 in 1915, 60 in 1930, 70 in 1955, and is today approaching 80 (a little more for women, a little less for men). The rest of the world is retracing the European increment in longevity.<sup>213</sup>

Nor does Sagan seem to overstating the case. A boy born in Liverpool in 1887 could expect to live only to age 26<sup>214</sup>, while according the BBC, the same child born in modern day Uganda, even in the midst of an AIDS hyper-pandemic, which has savagely cut the average life expectancy by sixteen years in the last decade, can still expect to live to 42.<sup>215</sup> What is the cause of this spectacular and unparalleled advance in the quality of human lives? While many use such figures to argue for the unquestionable greatness of capitalism, the truth as Sagan sees it, is both more prosaic and more significant:

<sup>213</sup> Carl Sagan. *The Demon-Haunted World*. pp. 12-13.

<sup>214</sup> Jörg Vögele. *Urban mortality change in England and Germany, 1870-1913*. p. 3.

<sup>215</sup> BBC Health. "A millennium of health improvement"@ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/241864.stm>

The germ theory of disease, public health measures, medicines and medical technology ...  
This is a precious offering from science to humanity - nothing less than the gift of life.<sup>216</sup>

Of course, quality of life is not the same as quantity of life, and given the horrors cataloged above, it is all too easy to imagine a situation where prolonged life is little more than a denial of even that last and most basic kindness. However, life expectancy is still a good meta-measurement of basic well-being for the simple reason that it reflects all other measures, since almost everything from infant mortality to the likelihood of dying violently, to the safety of working and living conditions, to diet, to arguable depression, stress, misery and anxiety, are features of longevity.

With this in mind, it seems that, were we to look at the brute facts - namely that those of us in the west today live three times longer, on average, than our grandparent's grandparents and in conditions of security, comfort, safety and anodyne bliss which would have been unimaginable to them - we must conclude that not only is there nothing uniquely traumatic about the modern world, but also that the modern world is as non-traumatic as any age has ever been. This is, of course, not to say that there are not vast and systemic problems with the modern world, or that these problems are somehow excusable or unimportant, but simply that on balance, and for an ever-growing section of the human race, life has improved constantly and astoundingly over the last century.

As such, it seems not only reasonable, but necessary to disregard the self-conscious catastrophism of Gray and Eagleton. For those of us alive now, and especially those of us able to read, think and write for a living, to complain that for all our blessings, there is yet something vaguely uneasy, uncertain, unsatisfying, chaotic or unflatteringly immoral in the modern world, is an act of obnoxious ingratitude, self-obsession and narcissistic self-pity which would be frankly inconceivable, were it not so common. Frankly, it is also dangerous.

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<sup>216</sup> Carl Sagan. *The Demon-Haunted World*. pp. 12-13.

### ***Shining all the Brighter:***

#### **The White Rose and the Danish revolt**

Although it seems frankly wicked to even entertain the thought that anything good could have come out of the Holocaust, there were a few precious examples of humanity as moral exemplar and instances of heart-breakingly ethical evolution that emerged out of the midnight of the century and which shine all the brighter for the darkness and death that rained down around them. An obscure but noteworthy example is this is the so- called White Rose: the non-violent, intellectual, student, almost proto-beatnik - resistance group that grew up at the University of Munich, around the sister and brother team of Sophie and Hans Scholl, determined, at the very least, to voice their opposition to the Nazis through a series of secretly-printed and distributed leaflets. Although it is all too easy to view the White Rose as painfully adolescent, it is also difficult to view them as not being eerily prescient. One of their leaflets, for example, proclaimed:

Who among us has any conception of the dimensions of shame that will befall us and our children when one day the veil has fallen from our eyes and the most horrible of crimes - crimes that infinitely outdistance every human measure - reach the light of day?<sup>217</sup>

Even more startling, at a time when most Germans maintained that they did not, and had not had any idea of the genocidal murders being committed in their name, the White Rose wrote that:

Since the conquest of Poland, three hundred thousand Jews have been murdered in this country in the most bestial way ... The German people slumber on in their dull, stupid sleep and encourage these fascist criminals ... Each man wants to be exonerated of a guilt of this kind, each one continues on his way with the most placid, the calmest conscience. But he cannot be exonerated; he is guilty, guilty, guilty!<sup>218</sup>

While the White Rose cannot be said to have, in any sense threatened, or even inconvenienced the Nazi regime, and in fact after their sixth leaflet, the Scholls and the rest of the White Rose leadership were arrested, and four days later, sentenced to death by guillotine, the White Rose does seem to have played a major role in the rehabilitation of Germaness, particularly for those who had been children during the war and were then forced to grow up with the crippling shame of being German.

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<sup>217</sup> Inge Scholl. *The White Rose*. p. 73.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid. pp. 77-79.

As Dorothee Solle noted, although to adults of Germany, the White Rose appeared to be a group of “highly idealistic” young people with “little sense of the realities of power and politics” and who in their bumptious naiveté had believed they could shout down the Nazi terror armed only with “the words of such classical German writers as Goethe and Schiller, and the wisdom of Lao-tse and the Bible ...”,<sup>219</sup> to anyone born after 1929, the White Rose was the future. To this new generation, crippled by the knowledge of what their people had done, the White Rose was the very soul of a redeemable future. As Solle writes, it was “... felt that it was just for us, the next generation, that they had died, preferring death to living under Hitler ... They died so that we would know that there had been at least a few people in Germany, a few students among hundreds of thousands, with a conscience.”<sup>220</sup>

Nor, though hagiographic sentiment is inevitable in such a case, and the White Rose seems to be unknown outside of Germany, does Solle seem to overstate the case. In a 2003 poll by the German public television network ZDF to find the greatest German in history, Hans and Sophie Scholl came in fourth, beating Willy Brandt, Bach, Goethe, Gutenberg, Bismarck and Albert Einstein, and making Sophie the only woman in the top ten.<sup>221</sup> In a similar poll by the German magazine *Brigitte*, Sophie Scholl was voted the greatest woman of the twentieth century.<sup>222</sup>

A far more famous and successful instance of heroic and humanitarian defiance is found in the refusal of the state of Denmark to hand over not only its own Jewish citizens, but also the stateless Jews who had refugeed to Denmark.<sup>223</sup> In August of 1943, Danish shipyard workers refused to repair German ships and went on strike. When the Germans tried to force them back to work, riots broke out.<sup>224</sup> When the Nazis declared a state of emergency, imposed martial law and spoke of introducing the yellow star, the king announced he would be the first to wear it,<sup>225</sup> and the Danish government made it clear that such a measure would lead to their immediate

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<sup>219</sup> Dorothee Solle’s introduction, in Inge Scholl. *The White Rose*. p. x.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid p. x.

<sup>221</sup> “Best Germans: Adenauer Beats Marx and Luther” @<http://german.about.com/cs/culture/a/bestger.htm>

<sup>222</sup> “Dare to Be Different.” *sublimemagazine.com* @ [http://sublimemagazine.com/view/a/39/Dare\\_To\\_Be\\_Different.html](http://sublimemagazine.com/view/a/39/Dare_To_Be_Different.html)

<sup>223</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. p 172

<sup>224</sup> Ibid.

<sup>225</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. p 171 – Note: this claim of King Christian X’s challenge, appears in all editions between 1963 and 1994, but seems to have been removed from the 2006 repackaged edition *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*.

resignation.<sup>226</sup> When the Germans announced to the Danish government that they intended to deport the Jews by brute force, the Danish government promptly warned the Jewish community, who went into hiding, which was made infinitely easier and more effective than in any other country by the fact that, as the Nuremburg judgment put it: “all sections of the Danish people, from the King down to simple citizens, stood ready to receive them.”<sup>227</sup> When the Danish government began to fear that the German military might start going from house to house to find the hidden Jews, they, with the help of the Danish fishing fleet, secreted nearly six thousand Jews, and non-Jews married to Jews, to Sweden.<sup>228</sup> As Arendt notes, this:

... is the only case we know of in which the Nazis met with open native resistance, and the result seems to have been that those exposed to it changed their minds ... They had met resistance based on principle, and their "toughness" had melted like butter in the sun ...<sup>229</sup>

It is also instructive to note here just what a major role the Danish Lutheran church played in the fomenting of this non-violent revolt. On October 3, 1943, when the riots in the shipyards could still have been little more than a series of street battles, the Bishop of Copenhagen, Hans Fuglsang–Damgaard, with the unanimous support of his bishops, wrote a sermon read from every pulpit in Denmark which declared that:

Whenever persecutions are undertaken for racial or religious reasons against the Jews, it is the duty of the Christian Church to raise a protest against it ... because the persecution of the Jews is irreconcilable with the humanitarian concept of love of neighbors, which follows from the message which the Church of Jesus Christ is commissioned to proclaim ... He has taught us that every man is precious in the eyes of God. We shall therefore struggle to ensure the continued guarantee to our Jewish brothers and sisters of the same freedom which we ourselves treasure more than life.<sup>230</sup>

This sermon helped to turn a native resistance that was, in the words of Arendt, “the result of an authentically political sense, an inbred comprehension of the requirements and responsibilities of citizenship ...”<sup>231</sup> into a righteous religious cause. It is also worth noting that it is possible that it was the Danish church’s very Lutheranism that had made it so immune to anti-Semitism, as being both Danish and Lutheran, it had been forced to wrestle with Luther’s chauvinistic German nationalism, and with it, his anti-Semitism, and as such, had to some degree, already been inoculated against Jew-

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. p.174.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid. p. 175.

<sup>230</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, “What Would Jesus Have Done? Pope Pius XII, The Catholic Church, and the Holocaust.” *The New Republic*. Vol 226, No.2, January 21, 2002 p. 27.

<sup>231</sup> Hannah Arendt. *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. p.179.

hatred. While this is pure conjecture, it is supported, at least in part, by the 1994 statement of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America on Christianity's history of anti-Semitism, which stated:

The Lutheran communion of faith is linked by name and heritage to the memory of Martin Luther, teacher and reformer ... In the spirit of that truth-telling, we who bear his name and heritage must with pain acknowledge also Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and the violent recommendations of his later writings against the Jews. As did many of Luther's own companions in the sixteenth century, we reject this violent invective, and yet more do we express our deep and abiding sorrow over its tragic effects on subsequent generations. In concert with the Lutheran World Federation, we particularly deplore the appropriation of Luther's words by modern anti-Semites for the teaching of hatred toward Judaism or toward the Jewish people in our day ... Grieving the complicity of our own tradition within this history of hatred, moreover, we express our urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people. We recognize in anti-Semitism a contradiction and an affront to the Gospel, a violation of our hope and calling, and we pledge this church to oppose the deadly working of such bigotry ...<sup>232</sup>

The example of the Lutheran communion here is as informative as it is uplifting, and reveals why we must reject the apathetic and despairing counsels of Gray and Eagleton. Their rejection of the reality, or even the possibility of moral evolution and progress, willfully obscures examples like that of the Danish people and Church, and the White Rose that should, and must become normative. We cannot simply hide in the dark chambers of pessimism and paint ourselves as helpless victims of the times, for exactly the same reason that Arendt argued that we could not hide behind the figure of the eternal anti-Semite.

We cannot deny our own agency in favor of claims that inhumanity and murder are simply the way of the world, or the spirit of the times, for if the fault is not in our own nature, then we are ultimately powerless, forever faced with the prospect that the wrong combination of events can tip us, impotent and oblivious into bacchanals of blood lust, fanaticism and all-too-human cruelty.

Even if we really are powerless, that is no excuse for inaction. We must, in the face of no possible answer to the question, simply assume that we do have agency over ourselves, and as Nancy Scheper-Hughes puts it, recognize:

... in our species (and in ourselves) a *genocidal capacity*. We must resist ... the human capacity to reduce others to nonpersons, to monsters or to things that give structure, meaning, and rationale to everyday practices of violence. It is essential ...

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<sup>232</sup> "Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community" @ <http://archive.elca.org/ecumenical/interreligious/jewish/declaration.html>

that we exercise a defensive hypervigilance, a hypersensitivity to the less dramatic, *permitted*, everyday acts of violence that make participation (under other conditions) in genocidal acts possible ... I would include all expressions of social exclusion, dehumanization, pseudo-speciation and reification that normalize atrocious behavior and violence toward others.<sup>233</sup>

Of course, this must, by necessity, be a relentless and eternal war with our own base nature, which if won, will never be noticed, but does not mean it is not worth the fight. As the famous and possibly apocryphal Spanish Civil War era Catalan slogan put it, “si venceremos nadie va a recorder, si fallamos nadie va a olvidar”, literally “if we succeed, no one will remember, if we fail, no one will ever forget.”

### ***History as a Selfishly Replicating Weapon***

A less important, but for our purposes more relevant question raised by the catalogue of horrors above, is the simple fact of how obscure such horrors are, and how they came to be so obscure. The answer here seems to be that, simply put, history has, in its popular form, simply been re-written. A surprisingly explicit example of this process is the role played by the ordinary soldiery of Nazi Germany in the massacre of Jews, discussed above. Adam Jones notes that the scale and scope of the army’s involvement in the slaughter of Jews was fully investigated at the Nuremberg trials. However, since both the Russians and the other Allies felt that the remnants of the German army were needed to help secure the new border that now ran through Germany, all agreed to not pursue the matter and instead “... a myth was cultivated that the *Wehrmacht* had acted ‘honorably’ in the occupied territories.”<sup>234</sup>

In a very real sense, given the colossal scope of history and the Malthusianly-limited resources available to impart a sense of that history to the general public, such ambitious revisions of even remembered history is probably easier than one might imagine. History, in at least the sense of what most people remember, has, in many ways, become Darwinian. What is counted as true, and as history, is that version of events which are, for whatever reason, reproduced, repeated, believed and passed on. As such any authority, by virtue of being authoritative can, most likely, outcompete the unauthorized, but more factual version of events.

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<sup>233</sup> Alexander Hinton (ed). *Annihilating Difference*. p. 369.

<sup>234</sup> Adam Jones. *Genocide: A Comprehensive History*. p. 152.



In this context, the churches must be viewed as being able to outcompete secular versions of history, and to have their own, more flattering version unconsciously and uncritically accepted into the modern historical canon. Churches are themselves an organ of dissemination, equipped with both a still-largely uncontested authority, and being invested in the minds of the faithful, with a divine and axiomatic authority, and perhaps most importantly, having a pre-existing audience with a considerable emotional investment in the virtuous and righteous history of their own tradition.

Furthermore, it takes no great feat of cynicism to suppose that to some degree, the reason we consider the present to be so uniquely and indomitably wicked, is a result of the churches having both sanitized the past - to obscure the rather unflattering record of how the churches behaved when they had the power to do as they pleased - and exaggerated the soulless wickedness of the present, in order to better make the case that without them we are hopelessly and damnably lost. Even if were not intentional, this is unquestionably what has happened. If fundamentalists are indeed, in their own minds, rebelling against the modern world, then it is most probably not the actual modern world that has aroused their ire, but rather a hyper-real and Manichean conception of the world, far more imagined than actual, and prized more for its utility than its truth.

### Chapter 3

#### In the Shadow of History

In the shadow of the charnel house of history's horrors we must ask ourselves, exactly how much of what we think we know is defensibly so? On a secular level these questions have been raised as historians and anthropologists have discussed, enumerated and to some degree, debunked the idea that modern world is unusually unpleasant, to the point that it seems likely that the exceptionality of modernity will soon go from shibboleth, to dubious-and-debatable claim. However, the question of how the religious reconcile such knowledge is still largely unexamined. How, for example, can C.S Lewis's argument that existence of the conscience proves the existence of God,<sup>235</sup> be considered convincing when, given the events of history, the human conscience seems dangerously fallible, easily fooled and massively subject to the vagaries of time and place. If the moral compass were placed within us by a benign creator, would it not be reasonable to assume that it would always point in more or less the same direction?

It is difficult to refute the observation that our conscience is utterly untrustworthy, especially viewed with the incalculable emotional weight of our species' history of horrors. This has positively destructive effects on the issue of theodicy, rendering the great, imponderable eternal problem for monotheisms not only theoretically unanswerable, but also making the very effort to offer an answer appear glib, repellent, self-indulgent and often destructively self-refuting. For example, the argument taken here from Richard Swinburn, that God could not have given humans free will to be good or evil "... without also permitting quite a lot of suffering ..."<sup>236</sup> is not only not an answer, since it simply brings the question back to fallibility of the conscience, but also, since, as Bart D. Ehrman notes, people in heaven presumably have free will, yet there is, we are told, no suffering<sup>237</sup>, also raises more troubling questions.

Of course, theologically this is counted as a result of sin. However this is in itself

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<sup>235</sup> C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity*. Chapters 1-4.

<sup>236</sup> Richard Swinburne. "Response to Richard Dawkins's comments on my writings in his book *The God Delusion*" @ <http://users.ox.ac.uk/~orie0087/framesetpdfs.shtml>

<sup>237</sup> Bart D. Ehrman. *God's Problem*. pp. 12-13.

problematic. If sin prevents us being able to form moral decisions, then we are left in the position of being punished for our immorality, by being rendered unable to be moral. This in itself, leads to the inescapable conclusion that we are, in the words of Fulke Greville's famous complaint "... Born under one law, to another bound...  
... Created sick, commanded to be sound."<sup>238</sup> If this is so, then we must conclude that we have, in fact, been denied free will, both by being prohibited from ever being able to chose the right by our traitorously error-prone moral compass, but also by having a conscience imposed and imposing on us.

This becomes even more troublesome if the existence of free will, such as it is, is held up as a moral good. For example, if we take Leibniz's argument that human free will was vital to make this the best world that could come into existence,<sup>239</sup> then surely we must accept that this is not the best world that could have come into existence. If we are to take Leibniz's formulation seriously, then we must accept that a hypothetical world in which God had given us an infallible moral compass, but denied us a conscience, thus making us free to choose the right, yet under no emotional pressure to do so, would be inordinately better. As such, under Leibniz's formulation, God has in fact, forced upon us the worst of all possible worlds, at once denying us both free will, and the ability to choose the right. Of course, one could argue that rendering us all, in effect, sociopaths would deny us the higher spiritual facilities, but this is an argument from ignorance, as sociopathy is always a result of a physically abnormal brain<sup>240</sup>. We have, and can have, no idea of how a cognitively-normal sociopath might behave, since in this world such an idea is oxymoronic.

Of course, such counter-factual metaphysical contestations can proceed endlessly. To every charge leveled above, there is a counter charge, but the important point here is that in the end, such arguments will end up in one of two places. The claim from what under Troeltsch's distinction would be called "the church", is simply that all such problems are by their nature mysterious and while they cannot be answered, we must remember that we can only see through a glass darkly and have faith that God is

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<sup>238</sup> Jonathan Dollimore. *Radical Tragedy: religion, ideology, and power in the drama of Shakespeare and his contemporaries*. p.128.

<sup>239</sup> John Cottingham. *Western Philosophy: an Anthology*. p. 260.

<sup>240</sup> King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry / News: "Altered connections on the road to psychopathy" @ <http://www.iop.kcl.ac.uk/news/default.aspx?id=321&>

arranging all towards a greater good. In contrast, the fundamentalist response is that God is not only inherently righteous, and that therefore whatever he does must be, by definition morally righteous, but also that God is the only metric by which right or wrong can be judged, and thus simply, one cannot even question God's morality. Thus, it would seem, that despite Lawrence's formulation,<sup>241</sup> fundamentalists, are not, in fact, universalists, conflicted or otherwise. Rather, fundamentalisms are the full-throated and chauvinistic roar of moral relativism triumphant. In many ways, the whole distinction between relativist and universalist runs aground here, as in the secular world, moral relativism is very rarely claimed openly by people of and for themselves, as to do so would in some sense, be to admit the relative inferiority of their own position. No one makes the claim that while their ways, cultures and beliefs are inferior to those of others, their culture can only be judged by its own standards. Rather, the claim is always that 'our' ways are more moral than those of 'others' and that the distance between our standards and those of 'others' is proof of 'our' superiority.

### ***In Defence of Prejudice: Moral relativism revisited***

Even Herder's defence of prejudice, while in practical terms, a justification of relativism, was in his own terms, a universal claim about the nature and value of knowledge. Herder was not claiming that thought and prejudice were simply different, culturally-defended and equally valuable ways of knowing, rather that prejudice was actually better than thought, and that this truth as proved by the fact that the more prejudiced nations tended to be the happiest.<sup>242</sup> As such, what we recognise as moral relativism, is almost always a claim made by those in a position of critique, of and for those being critiqued. In fact, apart from the occasional proclamation of nationalistic absolutism, be it "My country right or wrong" or "*Deutschland uber alles*", it is difficult to imagine what a secular claim of relativism made for one's self would look like. However, in the realm of fundamentalist apologetics, such claims are made not only explicitly, but often so ubiquitously as to appear functionally invisible, even to those making the claim.

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<sup>241</sup> Bruce B. Lawrence. *Defenders of God*. p. 2.

<sup>242</sup> Alain Finkielkraut. *Defeat of the Mind*. p. 20.

The website Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, which describes its purpose as “equipping ... Christians and defends the faith ...”<sup>243</sup> argues that relativism has become ascendant in western culture owing to the “rejection of God and Christianity in particular, absolute truth is being abandoned ...”<sup>244</sup> The pluralistic society, the site argues, rejects the idea that there really is a right and wrong, as evidenced by:

... our entertainment media which continues to push the envelope of morality and decency, in our schools which teach evolution and ‘social tolerance,’ ... the plague of moral relativism is encouraging everyone to accept homosexuality, pornography on TV, fornication, and a host of other ‘sins’ that were once considered wrong but are now being accepted and even promoted in society.<sup>245</sup>

Things have gotten so bad, according to *carm.org*, that anyone who questions “moral relativism and its ‘anything goes’ philosophy...” is “... labelled as an intolerant bigot ...” Thus, the site argues, moral relativism is a threat to the very existence of absolute morality, an absolute God, and absolute notions of right and wrong, as:

In order to say that something is wrong, we must first have a standard by which we weigh right and wrong in order to make a judgment ... In relativism, standards of right and wrong are derived from social norms ... If right and wrong change, then how can anyone be rightly judged for something he did wrong if that wrong might become right in the future?<sup>246</sup>

However, when the question turns to specifics like some of the more troublesome passages of scripture, as addressed in the “Bible difficulties” section of website of the Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, suddenly the absolute morality becomes a good deal less absolute. For example, when addressing the question of whether the command in Deuteronomy<sup>247</sup> to murder a woman found not to be a virgin on her wedding night, might be less than entirely moral, *carm.org* argues that:

Critics of the Bible must be careful not to impose their present day moral system upon that of an ancient culture found in Scripture and then judge Scripture as though it is inferior to their own subjective morality. The above verses were written 3000 years ago in a very different culture and location. Sexual purity was very highly valued, unlike today, and when a man would marry a woman, her virginity was critical.<sup>248</sup>

<sup>243</sup> The Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry, @ <http://www.carm.org/>

<sup>244</sup> “What is relativism?” @ <http://www.carm.org/secular-movements/relativism/what-relativism>

<sup>245</sup> Ibid

<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Deuteronomy 22:13-21

<sup>248</sup> “Stone a woman for not being a virgin?” @ <http://www.carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy/stone-woman-not-being-virgin>

The author continues, noting that in such cases, a dowry would have been paid to the father, in expectation that the bride would be a virgin and that furthermore, a woman's sexual purity was a sign of her father's righteousness, and that as such, a bride who turned out not to be a virgin would be demonstrative not solely of deception, fraud and arguable theft, but also of:

... outright rebellion against God's law. In this case, to insure the integrity of the family, and to remove the evil of adulterous/fornication from the community, stoning was advocated.<sup>249</sup>

Thus in the attempt to prove the superiority of absolute morality to subjective morality, the author ends up arriving at a moral relativism from three different directions. Firstly, and most obviously, the claim that the "verses were written 3000 years ago in a very different culture and location" and are thus subject to different moral imperatives, is of course, the original relativist position. Secondly, given the writer's apparent conviction that the command was absolutely righteous, and that it is modern morals that are subjective and impure, and that no the article offers no theological reason why the law no longer applies, this argument condemns every Christian who is not busy killing unwed mothers as a secret moral relativist, who privately feels that God's perfect morality is inferior to their own.

Thirdly, and most troublingly, is that the defence of God's perfect, absolute and universal morality is, in the end, simply a relativist argument exaggerated to the point of appearing universal. The point here is not simply that God's commands to kill unchaste women is not morally wrong but that nothing God says or does, no matter how apparently repugnant, cruel or stupid it may be, can ever be wrong. As *carm.org* puts it:

Sin is an offence to God's character ... Right and wrong ... is a manifestation of the character of God. God is holy ... Sin offends Him personally because they are His laws of right and wrong you are breaking ...<sup>250</sup>

As such, since morals generally are definable only in relationship to God, then they cannot be considered universal. If there really are universal moral absolutes, morals that apply always and to everyone, then by definition they must also apply to, and place equal demands on God, otherwise they are neither absolute nor universal. Of

<sup>249</sup> "Stone a woman for not being a virgin?"@ <http://www.carm.org/bible-difficulties/genesis-deuteronomy/stone-woman-not-being-virgin>

<sup>250</sup> <http://www.carm.org/apologetics/objections-and-answers/objections-and-answers-1-8>

course, it could be argued that God is a Higher Law and is not bound by the standards he has set for us. However, this does nothing to lessen the charge of relativism and in fact, only expands the context in which the relativistic standards apply, even if that context is the entirety of the mortal coil.

Furthermore, if God is not subject to such standards, there is presumably nothing to prevent the Divine from commanding mortals to commit wicked acts. This leaves us with the over-arching and catastrophic conundrum of how we are to judge one who transgresses the moral law, in furtherance of Divine will. If such a one is, or can be condemned, then we are, in effect declaring the moral law superior to the Divine will, and are, on this basis condemning God, if only by default. If, on the other hand, the Divine will is to take precedence over the moral law, then all morality is rendered so relativistic as to be meaningless, as the moral rightness or wrongness of any action ultimately can be measured only against the Divine will, our understanding of which is, by definition, imperfect at best.

***A Simple Answer to an Imponderable Question: Jonathan Haidt and the first draft of the moral mind.***

Of course, this inevitably raises the question of just what morality is and what it is for. Although this may seem an unanswerable meta-question, moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt has proposed and to some degree, convincingly demonstrated the existence of five psychological foundations for it, namely: (1) harm, (2) fairness, (3) ingroup-outgroup dynamics and the importance of loyalty, (4) authority and the importance of respect and obedience, and (5) bodily and spiritual purity and the importance of living in a sanctified rather than a carnal way.<sup>251</sup> However, interestingly, Haidt also notes that these five foundations are not given equal weight everywhere, as he explains:

I have found that the moral domain of educated Westerners is narrower—more focused on harm and fairness—than it is elsewhere ... And it's not just members of traditional societies who draw on all five foundations; even within Western societies, we consistently find an ideological effect in which religious and cultural conservatives value and rely upon all five foundations, whereas liberals value and rely upon the harm and fairness foundations primarily.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Jonathan Haidt. "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology." *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. pp. 998 – 1002.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

This distinction is rendered somewhat tricky by the fact that sometimes one or other of the foundations might mutate and re-emerge in a not immediately recognizable form. In a presentation to the Technology, Entertainment, Design (TED) Conference, Haidt noted, almost in passing, that liberal obsessions with organic food and chemicals in the food chain might be seen as a new liberal version of the notion of purity.<sup>253</sup> However, it could be argued that such concerns are more motivated by fear of possible health effects, and are thus a harm issue. Likewise, as discussed earlier, the reverence for authority may be argued to have not so much fallen into abeyance, as simply been replaced by a respect for expertise. In the larger sense, such fine distinctions are somewhat irrelevant.

Haidt's claim is not one of exclusive, absolute or binary distinction, but rather a kind of analogue moral calculation, perhaps best thought of as a pie chart. As such, the claim is not that Western liberals care only for harm and fairness, but rather that while all five foundations are still operative, the majority of the pie is taken up with questions of harm and fairness. Likewise, the argument is not that traditional or conservative groups or individuals do not care about harm and fairness, but rather that as concerns for purity, authority, respect and group loyalty grow, the amount of pie dedicated to harm and fairness must decrease as a percentage of the whole. Thus the liberal moral pie would look to be made up of two massive slices, with three tiny slices in between, while the conservative pie would be made up of five relatively equal slices. Thus, it is not so much that different people have different morals, as that we all have the same morals, but give differential weight, value, and emphasis to disparate aspects. This analogy is further complicated by the fact, as Haidt notes, that moral reasoning is not primarily a matter of reason, but is what he calls the primacy, but not dictatorship, of intuition and so called "affective primacy" meaning that the human mind is:

... composed of an ancient, automatic and very fast affective system, and a phylogenetically newer, slower, and motivationally weaker cognitive system ... brains are always and automatically evaluating everything they perceive, and that higher-level human thinking is preceded, permeated, and influenced by affective reactions (simple feelings of like and dislike) which push us gently (or not so gently) toward approach or avoidance.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> "Jonathan Haidt on the moral roots of liberals and conservatives" @ [http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan\\_haidt\\_on\\_the\\_moral\\_mind.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_on_the_moral_mind.html) 07:24 – 7:50

<sup>254</sup> Jonathan Haidt. "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology." *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. pp. 998 –1002.



As such, it seems safe to assume that the basic building blocks of human morality are emotional, and this unadorned sense of emotional moral reasoning can safely be said to go back far further than humankind, for the simple reason that we can see such moral reactions as “sympathy in response to suffering, anger at nonreciprocators, affection for kin and allies ...”<sup>255</sup> in our non-human primate kin. As was widely reported in a February 2009 study of primate behaviour, it was found that not only apes, but also some monkeys possess a sense of morality and the elementary ability to make judgments about fairness, offer altruistic help and empathise with other apes and monkeys and even sometimes animal of different species who were hurt or ill. The report even claimed that most apes and some monkeys appeared able to remember obligations, and were driven to repay them.<sup>256</sup>

To some degree, this unavoidably means that what we think of when we think of moral reasoning - that is, language-based and conscious moral reasoning – is both rather new – Haidt argues that they may well go back no further than 100 thousand years<sup>257</sup> – and a construction erected on the foundations of our basic primate morality. This is not to say that morality is basically irrational, or that moral reasoning is simply a fig leaf of rationality adorning basic and primal intuitions, but simply that when we are faced with a moral problem, the intuition comes first, in the form of “evaluative feeling of good-bad or like-dislike”<sup>258</sup> and only then does our conscious mental and language-based reasoning begin, often to justify the conclusion we have already reached. As Haidt puts it:

Moral reasoning, when it occurs, is usually a post-hoc process in which we search for evidence to support our initial intuitive reaction.<sup>259</sup>

As such, there seems good reason to assume that not all of the five foundations are rooted equally deeply, or are equally innate. Haidt notes, for example, that while children appear to have a hardwired sense of harm and fairness, at least in the abstract sense, they do not seem to have similar native sense of purity, respect or loyalty, at

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<sup>255</sup> Jonathan Haidt. “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology.” *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. pp. 998 –1002.

<sup>256</sup> Jonathan Leake. “Monkeys have a sense of morality, say scientists.” *The Sunday Times*. February 15, 2009 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/environment/article5733638.ece>

<sup>257</sup> Jonathan Haidt. “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology.” *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. p. 998 – 1002.

<sup>258</sup> Ibid p. 1000

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

least in the abstract. Haidt, in fact, goes so far as to admit with striking candor, that as things stand, there has simply not been enough research done to explain the "... development of patriotism, respect for tradition, and a sense of sacredness ..."<sup>260</sup>

***Too Important to Be Remembered: The issue of mythico-historical world making.***

However, since as we have seen, history can be and is rewritten to champion some notions and condemn others, it seems a not unreasonable surmise to name history, or at least that version of it that is remembered, as the means by which values are instilled and maintained. Nor is this simply theoretical. In her *Purity and Exile*, a study of Hutu refugees from Burundi living in refugee camps in Tanzania, Liisa Helena Malkki discusses what she dubs "mythico-historical world making" writing that:

The Hutu mythico-history represented an interlinked set of ordering stories which converged to make (or remake) a world ... it constructed categorical schemata and thematic configurations that were relevant and meaningful in confronting both the past ... and the pragmatics of every day life.<sup>261</sup>

Malkki is swift to point out that the use of the word 'myth' should not be taken as denoting truth or falsity, which she argues are largely irrelevant, but rather as meaning:

... concerned with order in a fundamental sense. That is the key. It was concerned with the ordering, and reordering of social and political categories, with the defining of self in distinction to other, with good and evil ... centrally concerned with the reconstruction of a *moral order* of the world. It seized historical events, processes and relationships, and reinterpreted them within a deeply moral scheme of good and evil.<sup>262</sup>

Thus, to a very large degree, the history that gets remembered is very much the ultimate case of what is usually meant by history being written by the winners, although with the added advantage that winning no longer counts. If one is victorious, then so much the better, but losing, is in its own way, sanctifying, as it simply further proves the wickedness of the world and the strength and courage 'we' have always shown in the face of such wickedness. As Malkki puts it:

The mythico-historical world making was an oppositional process; it was

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<sup>260</sup> Jonathan Haidt. "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology." *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. p. 998 – 1002.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid p. 1000

<sup>261</sup> Liisa Helena Malkki. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. p. 55.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid. p. 55.

constructed in opposition to other versions of what was ostensibly the same world, or the same past. The oppositional process of construction also implied the creation of the collective past in distinction to other pasts, thereby heroizing the past of the Hutu as a 'people'...<sup>263</sup>

Although Malkki makes no attempt to extrapolate this process of mythico-historical world-making out from the Hutu refugee camps and into the wider world, she does leave the door open, comparing the mythico-historical to the use of Biblical stories to “educate, explain, prescribe and proscribe”<sup>264</sup> and even draws similarities with the morality plays of the fifteenth and sixteenth century.<sup>265</sup> As such, there seems no clear reason to assume that this process is not, in fact, a human universal. Furthermore, if we consider Claude Levi-Strauss’s contention of the inherent historical conflict between description and explanation, and the concomitant claim that the closer one comes to explaining the totality of the world, the closer one comes to myth,<sup>266</sup> then there seems to be a clear theoretical argument that all religions and many political positions, are in fact, knowingly or not, engaged in myth-making, or “mythico-historical world making”. Unfortunately, to a large degree, theory cannot be factually tested, as the very ubiquity of such historical myths has made them, for most practical purposes, either vanishingly obscure or so commonplace as to be hidden in plain sight.

It is worth noting, for example, the eleventh of September, as a date which marks the anniversary of two notable Muslim defeats, the first, the arrival of John III Sobieski’s 80,000 strong Polish army at Kahlen Hill in 1683, ending the siege of Vienna,<sup>267</sup> and which marked the beginning of a string of Ottoman defeats, including the Battle of Zenta in 1697, also on the eleventh of September, which cost the Ottoman’s Transylvania, Hungary, and Slavonia.<sup>268</sup> Yet the historical significance of the date goes remarkably unremarked. Even Slavoj Žižek, in a column in the Guardian, decrying the lack of “cognitive mapping”, finds the only noteworthy “historical meaning of the date” to be the curious connection that:

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<sup>263</sup> Liisa Helena Malkki. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. p. 55.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* p. 54.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> Miriam Glucksmann. *Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought*. p.146

<sup>267</sup> Charles Morris. *Historical Tales: The Romance of Reality*. pp. 216-224.

<sup>268</sup> Sir Adolphus William Ward, George Walter Prothero, Stanley Mordaunt Leathes, *The Cambridge Modern History*, Volume 4. pp. 368-371.

Twelve years earlier, on November 9, 1989, the Berlin wall fell. The collapse of communism was perceived as the collapse of political utopias.<sup>269</sup>

This not to say that date of the attacks on New York was chosen as an historical allusion, for in truth the question has still not been examined to the point of convincingly demonstrating that the date was either loaded with meaning, or was simply a coincidence. However, this is entirely the problem. It is frankly incredible that eight years into 'the war on terror', we still know so little about the historical and cultural worldview of those we are fighting, but this is, unfortunately, the case. While all agree that the past informs the present, and most are willing to concede that culture, identity and cultural identity are both informed by history and informs how history is remembered, we at once lack either a comprehensive map to anyone else's historical memory, or the cognitive distance to map our own. However, there are exceptions here.

One that is most fruitfully-mined exceptions, is that of Palestinian cultural and historical identity, which has become tolerably well understood, as a result of Yasser Arafat being so emersed in mythic Palestinian history that those who sought to negotiate with him found it necessary to have at least a working knowledge of the finer points of Palestinian historical identity. As Shlomo Ben-Ami, one of the Israeli negotiators at Camp David and Taba, recalls:

In a long meeting I had with him (Arafat) in Nablus ... a fortnight before Camp David, he was careful to remind me, when our conversation turned ... to Jerusalem, of the Umar treaty of AD 638, signed between the Khalif Umar, the conqueror of Jerusalem, and the Byzantine Patriarch Sopronius, ... Arafat instructed me, the conditions of the capitulation of the Christians included a prohibition on the Jews living in Jerusalem.<sup>270</sup>

What the work of Ben-Ami and others have revealed is that Palestine identity is far more complex than anyone had guessed, or had seemed apparent. The movement that became embodied in Arafat was not simply, as its allies had argued, a movement of national liberation driven by issues of annexed land, or stolen water or self-determination, or statehood, or illegal and oppressive occupation. Nor was it, as its critics had alleged, a matter of a movement motivated by ancient tribalism and traditional Muslim animus towards Jews. This is not to say that these factors did not

<sup>269</sup> Slavoj Žižek. "On 9/11, New Yorkers Faced the Fire in the Minds of Men" @ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2006/sep/11/comment.september11>

<sup>270</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami. *Scars of Wars, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*. p.250

play their part but simply that the parts they played were relatively small parts of a much bigger whole. For example, while Palestinian identity exposed by Arafat was entwined with Muslim and Islamic identity, it is not a simple or unilateral transaction, as Muslim and Islamic identity were themselves informed by concepts of Arab identity and nationalism, which were in turn referenced back through Muslim identity and so on.

In many ways this may be unavoidable, as the greatest historical Arab triumphs, from the Arab conquests of the seventh and eighth centuries, to the birth of the Golden Age in the eighth century whereby the Arab world became the intellectual centre of the known universe for the next five centuries,<sup>271</sup> were all coterminous with, and driven by the emergence of Islam as a political force.<sup>272</sup> As such, to some degree, to be an historically conversant Arab, is to have your ethnic and historical identity shaped by Islamic history. Thus much of the legacy of Islamic glory could be meaningful and to some degree normative, even to non-Muslim Arabs. Arafat himself made considerable use of this fact and made considerable efforts to, in many ways, repaint the conflict as ethnic rather than religious, which is to say, one of Arabs, Muslims and Christians in conflict with Jews. One notable example, recorded by Raphael Israeli, was Arafat's trip to Bethlehem on Christmas day 1995, where:

... Arafat referred to: 'our blessed land,' which 'witnessed the birth of our Palestinian Messiah.' Thus, Arafat connected the blessed land to its messianic message, and widened the scope of his Islamic commitment to Palestine to embrace Christianity, as well, when he said that the Christians of Palestine are as Palestinian as the Muslims thereof since Christ himself was Palestinian ... But his *beau geste* of extending his loving care to Christianity in Palestine immediately resulted in the interpretation that he coveted ... when the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem declared to a delighted Arafat "Here is the successor of Sophronius welcoming the successor of Umar ibn Al-Khattab."<sup>273</sup>

Although this instance is often considered a cheap publicity stunt<sup>274</sup>, this should not lead to the conclusion that it was incidental or meaningless. The Patriarch's words were, in fact, so perfectly in keeping with Arafat's view of himself and the way he presented himself to the Palestinian street, that many thought that Arafat had stage-

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<sup>271</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p. 221.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. pp. 216–221.

<sup>273</sup> Ofer Feldman, Christ'l de Landtsheer (ed). *Politically speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere*. p. 26.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

managed, and written the Patriarch's words himself.<sup>275</sup> However regardless of the politics behind the event which perhaps shaped it, the message was still clear and worthy of note. The first point is that, as Ben-Ami observed

... Arafat's ambition to emulate Umar-el Katab was no mere anecdote. This was so important to him that on one occasion ... he even ordered the arrest of a Palestinian journalist ... for daring to relegate to the third page of the newspaper ... an article comparing him (Arafat) with that legendary 7<sup>th</sup> century Muslim conqueror of Jerusalem and liberator of its holy places. Arafat never ceased nurturing his image as a conqueror, as a modern ... Umar-el Kutab who would liberate Jerusalem from the infidels and redeem the holy places of Islam.<sup>276</sup>

More importantly however, than Arafat's self-perception is that in the figure of Umar ibn Al-Khattab, Arafat seems to have found a perfectly hybridized accommodation between the demands of Islamic and Arab identity. Even to non-Muslim Arabs, Umar was a potent symbol of Arab victory and conquests and of a long lost age of Arab dominance, while to non-Arab Muslims, Umar was the rightly-guided caliph<sup>277</sup>, a companion of, and second successor to Mohammad himself who had redeemed Jerusalem and the holy places, and had spread the true faith through Persia, Syria and Egypt.<sup>278</sup> In fact, in many ways, the symbolic use of Umar may be seen as an attempt to forge Arab unity at the expense of some Muslim loyalty, as to Shia, Umar is a deeply divisive figure, an illegitimate caliph, the usurper of Ali's throne, and murderer of Muhammad's daughter Fatimah.<sup>279</sup> Although this is pure conjecture, it is worth noting at least, the possibility that it this piece of politicking that made the Hizbollah so much more willing to work with Hamas than Fatah.

However, even this spirit of paradoxically exclusionary ecumenism, was in its own way, always a hostage to an over-riding Islamic hyper-narrative. Even if Arafat's remodelling of himself and the cause, in an attempt to incorporate non-Muslim Arabs into his movement, such attempts were somewhat undercut by the nature of the PLO's own public pronouncements and displays of pious nationalism, which were often so deeply sectarian, as to be meaningless to, and in some ways exclusionary of, non-Muslim Arabs. The elevation of the Al-Quds and the Haram Al-Sharif into

<sup>275</sup> Liisa Helena Malkki. *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*. p.26.

<sup>276</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami. *Scars of Wars, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*. p. 250.

<sup>277</sup> Karen Armstrong. *Islam, a Short History*. p. 206.

<sup>278</sup> Ibid. p. 21.

<sup>279</sup> Syed Husain Mohammad Jafri. *The Origins and Early Development of Shi'a Islam*. p. 59.

defining symbols of Palestinian identity, for example, is unavoidably problematic for non-Muslim Palestinians because, as Ben-Ami puts it “... the Dome of the Rock is the architectural expression of Islam as a religion that supersedes and is superior to all other religions.”<sup>280</sup>

Likewise, much of the history invoked by the PLO, most notably in the nomenclature used when naming its armed regiments, comes from Islamic, rather than, and often in exclusion to, Arab history.<sup>281</sup> For example, the naming of a regiment after the battle of Hattin, where Saladin roundly defeated the Crusaders<sup>282</sup>, might seem to be the combination of an Arab and Muslim victory, since it was in many ways a mortal blow to the power of the invading Franks<sup>283</sup>. However, such a reading is rendered problematic by the twin facts that, firstly, Saladin himself was neither a Palestinian nor an Arab, but a Kurd<sup>284</sup>, and was only in a position to challenge the might of the Franks after he had ordered the murder of Shawar, the ruler of the old Arab Fatimid empire, and the subsequent inauguration the Kurdish Egyptian Ayyubid dynasty which replaced that of the Arab Fatimids and which Saladin would go on to lead.<sup>285</sup> As such, Saladin did not so much liberate Palestine from the foreign invaders, or even return it to Arab control, as he captured it for the Kurdish Ayyubids.<sup>286</sup>

The same is true in broad strokes, of the Battle of Ain Jalut<sup>287</sup> in which the Mamluk armies of the Ayyubid sultanate defeated the invading Mongols in 1260.<sup>288</sup> Today, this forms a major part of the Palestinian ethos and eponym of the PLO's Ein Jalut regiment.<sup>289</sup> However this was not quite the clear-cut example of heroic Arab resistance against the infidel invader, it might at first appear, as in a military sense, all sides were equally non-Arab. The Mongols involved were led by the Nestorian Christian Turk, Kitbuqa<sup>290</sup> (or Kitbuka, or then again Ked-Buka) whose army was not

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<sup>280</sup> Shlomo Ben-Ami. *Scars of Wars, Wounds of Peace: The Israeli-Arab Tragedy*. p. 259.

<sup>281</sup> Ofer Feldman, Christ'l de Landtsheer (ed). *Politically speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere*. p. 26.

<sup>282</sup> David Nicolle. *Hattin 1187*. p.19.

<sup>283</sup> Ibid.

<sup>284</sup> Geoffrey Regan. *Saladin and the Fall of Jerusalem*. p. 37.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid. p. 25.

<sup>286</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys. *From Saladin to the Mongols*. p. 30.

<sup>287</sup> Other spellings include, Ayn Jalut, and Ein Jalut

<sup>288</sup> R. Stephen Humphreys. *From Saladin to the Mongols*. p. 358-360.

<sup>289</sup> Ofer Feldman, Christ'l de Landtsheer (ed). *Politically speaking: A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere*. p 26.

<sup>290</sup> J. J. Saunders. *The History of the Mongol Conquests*. p.108.

solely Mongol, but made up in large part of also Turks, Georgians, Alans and Armenians<sup>291</sup>. The Muslims, meanwhile were again led by the Kurdish Ayyubids,<sup>292</sup> and the Mamluks, who did the fighting, were not Arabs either, but mostly Kipchak Turks.<sup>293</sup> Again, there is also the problem that the defeat of the Mongols did not usher in a birth of freedom and national independence for Palestine, or even Arabs, but again simply re-established the rule of the Kurdish Ayyubids.

With this in mind, it seems unavoidable that, from a purely factual point of view, neither Saladin nor the Mamluks can be honestly viewed as Arab heroes, or for that matter, heroes of Palestinian national liberation, or even warriors who resisted and defeated armies of colonial imperialism. Consequently, we are faced with the conundrum that Saladin is promoted as an inclusive figure, as both a Palestinian national hero and a hero of Palestinian national resistance against imperialism, almost entirely because he was a Muslim who killed and defeated non-Muslims, and recaptured the Holy places of Jerusalem for Islam, in the pursuit of his own imperial ambitions. In many ways, the celebrations of these somewhat ambiguous conquests, from this standpoint is simply and straightforward mythico world-making narrative logic. Since, at least in part, the purpose is to make heroic the group recounting the history, then the heroes of the history must axiomatically be heroic, and thus painted as laudable regardless of the moral ambiguity of their actions.

A prime example of this from the western tradition is the figure of Richard the Lionheart. To some degree Richard is still considered the epitome of English gallantry, if only because of his role as rightful and righteous king in the Robin Hood stories, even though he was French, in his ten-year reign only spent six months in England, never learned a word of English and was in the words of William Stubbs:

... a bad king: his great exploits, his military skill, his splendour and extravagance ... do not serve to cloak his entire want of sympathy, or even consideration, for his people. He was no Englishman, but it does not follow that he gave to Normandy, Anjou, or Aquitaine the love or care that he denied to his kingdom. His ambition was that of a mere warrior: he would fight for anything whatever, but he would sell everything that was worth fighting for. The glory that he sought was that of victory rather than conquest.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> J. J. Saunders. *The History of the Mongol Conquests*. p.108.

<sup>292</sup> *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Vol 1. "Ayn Jalut, Battle of". p 751a.

<sup>293</sup> J. J. Saunders. *The History of the Mongol Conquests*. p. 117.

<sup>294</sup> William Stubbs. *The Constitutional History of England*. Vol. 1. pp. 550-551.



Nor are these anomalous cases. History is always twisted to conform to the demands of religion, culture, tradition, identity and politics. In fact, in a very real sense such confabulations of events, meanings and values, might be said to be what culture, at bottom, is. Speaking in a vastly different, but oddly similar context, that of the Irish Troubles, Louise Richardson, who grew up Catholic in the Northern Ireland of the 1960's noted that:

... Less important than the facts of the history was the way this history was remembered, and passed down. It is this remembered history, invariably over simplified, with heroes and villains overdrawn, that mobilizes and motivates the next generation. The facts don't seem to matter so much ...<sup>295</sup>

### ***Quislings or Patriots? The Maccabee revolt.***

A perfect example of this rearranging of history, coming from the Jewish side, is the case of the Maccabee uprising or revolt. While the name seems to mean nothing to most gentiles, the Maccabees are remembered as the heroes of the Chanukah story, and according to Karen Armstrong, the eponym of the Israeli basketball team<sup>296</sup> and of course, the name of the heroic nation-building terrorist group in Leon Uris's novel *Exodus*.<sup>297</sup> However, since they are so unknown in the gentile world, they actually provide a very interesting case for the study of the collusion of history and myth. Oskar Skarsaune, for example in his *In The Shadow of the Temple* asks what was at stake in this revolt?

The answer seems rather obvious: the Maccabean uprising represented Judaism's self-defence against the enforced 'Hellenization' carried out by Antiochus. The Maccabean uprising made evident the incompatibility of Judaism and Hellenism. The Maccabean fighters and martyrs should be seen as prominent members in the long chain of Jewish martyrs, who throughout the ages have preferred to give up their lives rather than deny God and his law.<sup>298</sup>

Historian Jennifer Michael Hecht, meanwhile paints the revolt not as a clash between powerful pagan oppressors and determined Jewish victims, but rather a program of "murder and forcible circumcision" of "secular Jews at the hands of a zealot Jew, and it ran the cosmopolitan Jewish way of life out of town."<sup>299</sup> Interestingly however, factually speaking, the two stories are almost exactly the same, the difference lying solely in the interpretation, emphasis and sequence of events. Both sides agree, that in 200 BCE, Antiochus III defeated the armies of Ptolemy in Gaza and took position of

<sup>295</sup> Louise Richardson. *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*. pp. 3-4.

<sup>296</sup> Karen Armstrong. *The Battle for God*. p. 367.

<sup>297</sup> Leon Uris. *Exodus* p. 365.

<sup>298</sup> Oskar Skarsaune. *In the Shadow of the Temple*. p. 25.

<sup>299</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p. 61.

Judah as a new province in the Seleucid Empire. This empire passed into the hands of Antiochus IV in 175 BCE who changed his name to Antiochus Epiphanes or Antiochus *the illustrious* or *revealer*, and began a program to bring the light of Hellenic civilization to the provinces, attempting to introduce a universal legal code for all his subjects. Antiochus Epiphanes then forced the high priest Simon to retire, and installed Simon's son Jason as the new high priest. Then in 171 BCE, Antiochus Epiphanes fired Jason and replaced him with a new high priest Menelaus, who petitioned Antiochus Epiphanes, asking that Jews be placed under the common Seleucid law and that this secular law should be enforced in preference of, precedence over, and to the exclusion of the religious law. Antiochus Epiphanes agreed, and launched an often brutal campaign of religious repression against those pious Jews who defied the law and cleaved to the religious law. In thanks to Antiochus Epiphanes for his intervention, Menelaus defiled The Temple, placing in it a statue of Zeus and encouraging people to sacrifice to it. Outraged by this desecration of the temple, a pious provincial priest named Mattathias Hasmon gathered together his five sons and a large following who adopted the name Maccabee (literally "hammer") and set to challenge the secular law. All this came to a head in 165 BCE when Mattathias and the Maccabees stood in front of the Hellenic altar in Modien and attempted to convince the locals not to sacrifice to the foreign gods. When a local man refused to listen and stepped forward to sacrifice, Mattathias killed him. Thus began the Maccabean revolt in which the Maccabees would eventually triumph, force the Seleucid empire to quit Judah and ushering in the rule of the Maccabees which would last until the Roman invasion of 63 BCE.<sup>300</sup>

While this is admittedly, a thumbnail sketch, such a quick outline is necessitated since these facts are all anyone can agree on. However, within these events, there is already an astounding degree of ambiguity. Was Antiochus Epiphanes a tyrant bent on oppressing and destroy monotheism, or was he a progressive reformer attempting to protect all his subjects equally under the law? Was Menelaus a traitor and a quisling engaged in a theatrical political conspiracy to give Antiochus Epiphanes a pretext on which to wage a war of annihilation against Judaism, or was he a sincere moderate

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<sup>300</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. pp.48- 62. Also see: Sarah Iles Johnston. *Religions of the Ancient World*. pp 185 – 188; Oskar Skarsaune. *In the Shadow of the Temple*. pp. 24 –27; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Second Edition, Volume 13. p. 316; Bart D. Ehrman. *God's Problem*. pp. 206-215.

patriot attempting to save his secular coreligionists from the predations of the zealots? Likewise, was Antiochus Epiphanes's program of suppression, an attempted root-and-branch destruction of Judaism or simply an over-zealous attempt to break the power of a growing group of militants? Was, for that matter, Mattathias Maccabee a hero of national liberation and a holy martyr protecting the faith of his people from the totalitarian coercion of the Seleucid empire, or a theocratic terrorist bent on re-establishing his own version of Judaism onto an unwilling population through massacre, mayhem, ritualistic humiliation and homicide?

The truth is that the answers to these questions depend very much on who is talking, which is one of the major problems, as the only texts we have telling of the uprising and the events leading up to it, from the Judean point of view, are the first and second books of Maccabee,<sup>301</sup> both written during the reign of the Maccabees and both of which appear in large part, to be cases of 'the winners' writing the history.<sup>302</sup>

For example, in the framing of the story, of the books of Maccabee, and later traditions, it seems natural to consider the Hellenic Jews cowards, hirelings and optimistic traitors who collaborated in the oppression of their tradition and their people and their heritage, for the sake of social advancement and the sensual pleasures of Greek civilization. However, it is worth remembering that this is almost certainly not how it appeared to the Hellenic Jews themselves. By the time of the revolt, the tradition of Hellenic cosmopolitanism was scarcely less deeply embedded and rooted in Judean life, as was the Judaism of the second temple. Hellenic culture had first come to the region with Alexander the Great in 322 BCE, and though for much of the next two centuries, Judea was won and lost and won again in the ongoing wars between the Seleucid and Ptolemaic empires, both empires shared a similar reverence for all things Greek. This part of the story is often overlooked, or at least overshadowed by the conviction that the Hellenized Jews were simply quislings and collaborators. However, Jennifer Michael Hecht, who has done sterling work on the degree to which Seleucid and Ptolemaic Jewry embraced Hellenic culture, has found that to a large degree, urban Judaism was largely bi-cultural. Jews tended to use Greek names in public life, and became enamoured of Greek festivals, drama, poetry,

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<sup>301</sup> Bart D. Ehrman. *God's Problem*. pp. 214-215

<sup>302</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. pp. 50-57.

and not least philosophy – particularly the Epicureans, Skeptics, Stoics and Cynics – and scholarship.<sup>303</sup> In fact, Elias J. Bickerman has gone so far as to argue that the first Jewish school system, the Pharisee schools of the third and second century BCE, had been founded in many ways in direct imitation of the Greek schools of philosophy.<sup>304</sup> Hellenization went so far, that Jews writing in Greek, and in Greek translations of the Torah, often used the Zeus and God interchangeably.<sup>305</sup>

Greek notions of scholarship and study had become so ubiquitous that some Jews even started indulging in the world's first Biblical criticism and concluded that the Law of Moses was certainly not as old as Moses, and was probably not more than a few hundred years old. However, this did not lead to a full-fledged rejection of Judaism, but rather to the spectacularly syncretic compromise of largely disregarding the Law of Moses, and going back to Abraham, who they noted, did not keep the Law of Moses and was seen as more cosmopolitan since he had led an "... an outward-bound, familial legion..."<sup>306</sup> in search of a new home.<sup>307</sup>

While to some degree, the suffering of the pious Jews under the persecutions of Antiochus Epiphanes, would seem to make a focus on the virtues of Greek culture seem either irrelevant, or simply special pleading, the narrative that the persecution was an attempt to eradicate pious Judaism, is actually highly dubious. As Sarah Iles Johnston notes, religious persecution of the type described was more or less unheard of in the context of the time and there are no records of simular Seleucid oppression generally or oppression ordered specifically by Antiochus Epiphanes anywhere else.<sup>308</sup> The question is further complicated by the fact that as soon as he lost the position of high priest, Jason started a civil war of his own, rampaging through the small towns and villages whipping up support against the new high priest Menelaus.<sup>309</sup> As such, with an obsessively religious civil war under way, and subsequent radicalisation of the moderates, which is to say the traditionalists, who had previously recognized the

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<sup>303</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p.51.

<sup>304</sup> Elias J. Bickerman. *The Jews in the Greek Age*. pp. 161-176.

<sup>305</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p. 59.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid. p. 53.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Sarah Iles Johnston. *Religions of the Ancient World*. p. 186.

<sup>309</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p. 58.

benefits of Hellenic culture, Menelaus really had no political option but to make himself the champion of Hellenic Judaism.

In this context, his request to Antiochus Epiphanes asking that Judea be placed under secular Seleucidian law which should exert its full weight and majesty on those who objected, seems simply the somewhat desperate act of a man fearing for his position, if not his life. Likewise the desecration of the Temple, which is to say the erection of an altar to Zeus, was probably less a studied insult to Jewish religious feeling, than simply a case of Menelaus giving the Hellenized Jews who made up his power base, what they wanted. Among the urban and educated Jews there appears to have been no sense that there was anything even potentially problematic in the placement of Zeus's altar, since, as already noted, to most metropolitan Jews, the difference between the God of Abraham and Zeus was negligible, and more importantly, Zeus himself had become more or less a secular symbol for all things Greek.<sup>310</sup> As such, to many sacrificing on the altar of Zeus was:

... a symbolic show of solidarity with the universalist ideal ... the Temple was now to be a universal ecumenical center, open to all ... an interdenominational god was to stand as a single focus for all, and the God to represent this equality was the old Olympic God Zeus.<sup>311</sup>

Thus recast, and with an understanding that in some senses the uprising had started with Jason's call to civil war, and thus before the persecution started, and that the Maccabees themselves had launched their own campaign of terror, persecution and public humiliation, including forcible public circumcision,<sup>312</sup> in their own attempts to stamp out Hellenic Judaism, the persecution cannot itself be held up as proving that the Maccabees were the good guys, or that their revolt was an uprising against cruelty and tyranny. Likewise, syncretic or not, Hellenic Judaism seems to have been, in many ways, less a rejection of Jewishness, than a reinterpretation of what it meant to be Jewish. Thus the Maccabees cannot be said to have, in any sense, fought for religious freedom.

Consequently, the Maccabee revolt raises the issue of the right to apostasy. Even if embracing Greek ways was seen as a rejection of the God of their forefathers within

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<sup>310</sup> Jennifer Michael Hecht. *Doubt: a History*. p. 59.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

the context of the legalistic Judaism of their time, such a move did make an odd kind of sense. Firstly, it must be remembered that at the time, Judaism had no conception that fealty to God would be rewarded in an after life. According, the temple-based and priestly Judaism of the time, which relied on a largely unreconstructed adherence to the legalism of Ezra being in covenant with God, was to a significant degree, a matter of temporal pragmatic politics and protection. In exchange for being God's people, God would deliver triumph and safety and prosperity. Thus, God was to some degree, only as good as his word, and since, as Bart Ehrman notes, the nearly three hundred years since Ezra had reiterated the importance of the law in gaining God's favour and aid, the Jew's every increase in observance had been answered by a catastrophic disaster, and:

Israel continued to experience famine, drought, pestilence, war, and destruction. Just on the military front, after the nation was overrun by the Assyrians, there came the Babylonians. After them came the Persians. And then the Greeks. Then the Egyptians. Then the Syrians ... One after another, the great empires of the world overwhelmed and absorbed tiny Israel, leading to one political setback, one military defeat, one social nightmare after another.<sup>313</sup>

Consequently, given that God seemed to have failed so utterly in living up to his side of the bargain, why should we condemn people from walking away and shopping for other gods? The answer, it seems, is that this would simply be bad story telling. Returning to Malkki, the point of a people's history is to build and instil in-group loyalty and a respect for the sacred nature of their tradition and the symbols. Our mythico-historical narratives form the basic and ground-level assumptions that inform and are informed by the overarching narrative which give the prosaic facts of history their meaning. As such, the narrative always dictates that the person repeating and codifying the history is morally righteous, since to some level, the codified history gives words like right and moral their meaning. Thus an account of the Maccabees that concluded that they simply were murderously intolerant bigots, would, in effect, be as paradoxical and counter-productive as attempting to establish your personal creditability by forthrightly admitting to be a liar. Thus the narrative structure simply demands that the apostates be wicked. Were the Hellenised Jews not evil, or at least weak, cowardly and traitorous, then the Maccabees' campaign of violent repression would be a stain on the people and a shame to the tradition, thus denying the authority of the story itself.

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<sup>313</sup> Bart D. Ehrman. *God's Problem*. p 89.

However, mitigating against this is the fact that almost all of those killed in the revolt were Jewish, and more to the point, more or less secular Jews, which understandably has created a deep ambivalence about the Maccabees amongst secular or cultural Jews. The *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, for example, treads a very careful course, noting that “.... It was no accident that the revolt broke out at a rural location ... and not in Jerusalem itself ...”<sup>314</sup> thus hinting at the fact that the civil war proceeded the persecution without ever actually saying so. Likewise, the authors take the middle ground on the question of whether the Maccabees were heroes or villains, patriots or fanatics, stating rather diplomatically that the object of the revolt “... was clearly to return to the religious autonomy Jews originally enjoyed, but the later successes of the revolt dictated otherwise.”<sup>315</sup>

***Saint Che: The ubiquity of syncretic faith.***

The modern Jewish ambivalence about the Maccabees points to what is ultimately at the heart of historical ‘truth’. There was nothing evil or cowardly or even unusual about the Hellenic Jews; they were simply doing what people always do. People are, no matter how pious or committed to their faith, deeply and irreducibly syncretic, it is simply part of our nature. This process has been noted in contexts as diverse as Rudolf Bultmann’s observation that each generation reinterprets the scriptures in the light of its own experience,<sup>316</sup> and Mark Twain’s quip that the world corrects the Bible.<sup>317</sup> While this seems well-accepted, it is seldom commented on, or more often is seen as an historical process that works at generational speed, when it is, in fact, a personal phenomena operating unconsciously in real time.

A striking example of this surfaced in 2007 when, to mark the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Che Guevara’s death, several newspapers sent reporters to Bolivia to report on how Che is remembered. What the journalists found, was that Che Guevara is now worshipped as a saint in much of Bolivia, not because the church co-opted his memory, but simply because people started treating Guevara like a saint, and the church found that, in the

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<sup>314</sup> Fred Skolnik (ed). *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Second Edition, Volume 13. “Maccabees.” p. 316.

<sup>315</sup> Ibid.

<sup>316</sup> For discussion of this process see the introduction to Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word*.

<sup>317</sup> Mark Twain, “A Pen Warmed Up in Hell”, in Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Reading for the Nonbeliever*. p. 121.

words of one priest, to the people, Guevara is "... just like any other saint ... He is just like any other soul they are praying to. One can do nothing."<sup>318</sup>

The veneration of Guevara has indeed become almost identical to that of any other saint. As *The Guardian* reported, the laundry where Guevara's corpse was laid is now a place of pilgrimage, and his picture is often found hanging alongside images of Jesus, the Virgin Mary, Pope John Paul II and Bolivia's first indigenous president Evo Morales. Che has even been credited with miracle cures.<sup>319</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* confirms this point, noting that:

The peasants say that if you whisper Ernesto "Che" Guevara's name to the sky or light a candle to his memory, you will find your lost goat or cow. 'If you really have faith, he never fails,' Juan Pablo Escobar says ...<sup>320</sup>

Nor are such syncretic movements only found in the developing world, although they are less pronounced in the west. There are, for example, myriad cases of the religious ignoring the views of their religion. One particularly interesting instance was turned up recently by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. Pew notes that almost every mainstream American church, with the exception of the Lutheran Missouri Synod and the National Association of Evangelicals who maintain official support for the death penalty, have called either for the abolition of, or at least a moratorium on the death penalty. However, in spite of this, the American public continues to support the death penalty by a margin of almost 2 to 1<sup>321</sup>. Nor does this statistic break down easily or even as one might expect, by religious affiliation. According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, American evangelicals, whose churches explicitly support the death penalty, are only 7% less likely to oppose the death penalty than white Catholics,<sup>322</sup> despite the fact that the catechism of the Catholic Church states that the death penalty is not justifiable in the modern world.<sup>323</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Andres Schipani. "The final triumph of Saint Che." *The Observer*. Sunday 23 September 2007 found @<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/sep/23/theobserver.worldnews>

<sup>319</sup> Ibid.

<sup>320</sup> Hector Tobar. "On a tourist trail in Bolivia's hills, Che's fame lives on." *Los Angeles Times*. October 17, 2004 found @

[http://www.boston.com/travel/articles/2004/10/17/on\\_a\\_tourist\\_trail\\_in\\_bolivias\\_hills\\_ches\\_fame\\_lives\\_on/](http://www.boston.com/travel/articles/2004/10/17/on_a_tourist_trail_in_bolivias_hills_ches_fame_lives_on/)

<sup>321</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "An Enduring Majority: Americans Continue to Support the Death Penalty" @ <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=272>

<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.



This is, of course, not to say that people are not serious about their religion. It is difficult to talk in terms of ‘pure’ religion, as religion cannot be separated from what religious people do in any meaningful sense. The world’s religions are not monolithic, and what people actually believe, is not always what the religious authorities tell them to believe. People are naturally curious, and like to know things, and as such, the faithful will always have a natural attraction to exotic ideas. If the new ideas are not obviously contradictory to the old ideas, they will become part of the tradition. The only force standing against this catch-as-catch-can cultural evolution is the sheer weight of tradition, and the authority of the professionally religious. However, going back again to Haidt and what follows, we can see that the respect commanded by the tradition, and the power of the authority itself, comes in a large degree from the tradition itself, as decreed by authority.

What gives intuition its primacy while denying it dictatorship, is the fact that the rational moral mind is capable, when presented with new evidence, or even the same evidence from a different point of view, of over-riding the emotional response, thus enabling, and in fact to some degree forcing, a constant revision of our moral universe. For example, it is close to impossible for anyone with even a passing familiarity of the horrors of Stalin’s Russia, Hitler’s Germany, or the incompetently choreographed slaughter of the first world war to argue that what was known to the Victorian and Edwardian minds as ‘duty’, meaning an unquestioning reverence for authority and the all conquering importance of blind obedience, are automatic or praise-worthy moral goods.

Although it seems half-forgotten now, the moral reordering of the European universe after World War I was so spectacularly complete, that to compare the attitudes before and during the war, with those after, often leaves one wondering if such disparate basic cultural assumptions come from the same age, let alone emerged in the space of four years. It is worth looking at Kipling’s comical music hall Tommy, offering the toast:

So 'ere's to you, Fuzzy-Wuzzy, an' your friends which are no more,  
If we 'adn't lost some messmates we would 'elp you to deplore.  
But give an' take's the gospel, an' we'll call the bargain fair,  
For if you 'ave lost more than us ... you broke a British square!<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Rudyard Kipling. “Fuzzy-Wuzzy.” *Barrack-room ballads and Other Verses*. p. 150.

Then regard Wilfred Owen's heartsick soldier muttering accusingly that:

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin...  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent/ for some desperate glory,  
 The old Lie; *dulce et decorum est*  
*Pro patria mori.*<sup>325</sup>

This erosion of, and calculated condemnation of authority was not reserved simply for the secular and military authority. Siegfried Sassoon, for example, turns his rage on the church, writing in arch and devastating terms that:

The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back  
 'They will not be the same; for they'll have fought  
 'In a just cause: they lead the last attack  
 'On Anti-Christ; their comrades' blood has bought  
 'New right to breed an honourable race,  
 'They have challenged Death and dared him face to face.'

'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.  
 'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;  
 'Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;  
 'And Bert's gone syphilitic: you'll not find  
 'A chap who's served that hasn't found some change.'  
 And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'<sup>326</sup>

Oddly and perhaps the most far-reaching reversal comes from Kipling himself. Before World War One, or perhaps more to the point, before his son Jack Kipling became a casualty, Kipling had been the jingoistic troubadour of empire, going as far as to champion the glories of duty even in the face of inevitable failure, urging for example, the white man to "Have done with childish days—The lightly proffered laurel, / The easy, ungrudged praise ..." despite accepting that all such men were doomed to finding that "... when your goal is nearest / The end for others sought / Watch sloth and heathen Folly / Bring all your hopes to nought."

However, after Jack Kipling was killed at the battle of Loos<sup>327</sup>, Kipling turned on, not just the king, or the military, or the church, but on God Himself, writing in his Epitaphs of the War - a poem most famous for the couplet "If any question why we

<sup>325</sup> Wilfred Owen. "Dulce et Decorum Est." *The Collected Poems of Wilfred Owen*. p. 55.

<sup>326</sup> Siegfried Sassoon. "They." *The War Poems of Siegfried Sassoon*. p. 47.

<sup>327</sup> Leonée Ormond. Introduction to Rudyard Kipling, *Captains Courageous*. p. xli

died / Tell them, because our fathers lied”<sup>328</sup> - the equally damning although now largely forgotten lines:

Lord, I was beneath Thy hand  
Ere yet the planets came.  
And now - though planets pass, I stand  
The witness to Thy shame.<sup>329</sup>

Of course, this rejection of authority was not uncontested, as while some rejected all authority, others concluded that the problem with pre-war Europe was that it hadn't been authoritarian enough, and produced fascism and to some degree Stalinism, which then rendered duty and authority, in some senses, irredeemable. While this is, of course, a massive over-simplification of the history of the decline of western respect for authority, considering that the roles and interplay of the five foundations in the moral universe of Nazism and Stalinism are, even at first glance, massively complex. For our purposes, the important point is simply how massively the locus of morality can shift in a very short time.

This is where Haidt's observations shift from being a merely interesting insight into the functioning of the moral mind and becomes, *in potentia*, outright threatening. With our moral minds thus deconstituted, the chamber of horrors discussed earlier becomes not just a disturbing competition of dire cruelty and irreducible wickedness, but also, in one important sense, a threat to the very notion of morality. As once the idea of the axiomatic righteousness of authority is cracked, the crack will, given time, run all the way down.

The prime example of this is the Catholic Church's response to the raft of books from David I. Kertzer,<sup>330</sup> Dr. Susan Zuccotti<sup>331</sup> Michael Phayer,<sup>332</sup> Guenter Lewy,<sup>333</sup> James Carroll,<sup>334</sup> John Cornwell,<sup>335</sup> and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen<sup>336</sup> - amongst others - accusing that the papacy of Pope Pius XII had – owing to either latent anti-Semitism,

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<sup>328</sup> Rudyard Kipling. "Epitaphs of the War." George Benjamin Woods, Jerome Hamilton Buckley. *Poetry of the Victorian Period*. p. 806.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> David I. Kertzer. *The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Modern Anti-Semitism*.

<sup>331</sup> Dr. Susan Zuccotti. *Under His Very Windows: The Vatican and the Holocaust in Italy*.

<sup>332</sup> Michael Phayer. *The Catholic Church and the Holocaust, 1930-1965*.

<sup>333</sup> Guenter Lewy. *The Catholic Church And Nazi Germany*.

<sup>334</sup> James Carroll. *Constantine's Sword*.

<sup>335</sup> John Cornwell. *Hitler's Pope*.

<sup>336</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*.

or bloodthirsty anti-communism, or simply out of a desire to be on the side of the winner, whoever that might be – maintained a conspicuous silence in the face of the Holocaust, if not outright collaboration with the Nazis. These books themselves seem to have been motivated by Pope John Paul's repeatedly expressed intention to make Pius XII a saint.

Although the arguments are heavily debated, the important point is not the truth or falsity of the claims, but the almost exponential rate at which the authority of an institution can erode when it attempts to shore up its authority with arguments made from that authority. In this case, the only way to avoid the accusation that Pius XII was weighed in the balance and found wanting, and thus avoid the admission that the pope, or at least one pope was not in fact infallible, and thus save the authority of the papacy, is to argue that the Pius XII was right to act as he did. Thus, rather than attempt to refute the claims of Pius XII's complicity, which are tacitly admitted, the effort to rehabilitate Pius XII has focused on attempting to find a way to justify his inaction.

One of the more problematic examples of this project, is the Vatican's response to the question of why it never excommunicated anyone for participation in The Final Solution. The official line, repeated here by Sister Margherita Marchione is that

Because of their violent actions against the German clergy, Hitler and the other Nazi leaders who were born Catholic, incurred automatic excommunication under Canons 2332 and 2343 ... One cannot claim that Hitler and other baptized leaders were still members of the Catholic Church.<sup>337</sup>

As such, it is argued that a second, public excommunication would have been redundant, and purely symbolic.<sup>338</sup> While this may be true, it is also an entirely irrelevant, and exceedingly tone-deaf response. Even if one accepts the legitimacy of the defence, such a defence cannot help but engender the feeling that, when faced with one of the most real, immediate, pressing and clear-cut evils in modern times, the Vatican could still not free itself from its overarching and unswayable obsession with the niceties of canon law.

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<sup>337</sup> Margherita Marchione. *Pope Pius XII: Architect of Peace*. pp. 44-45.

<sup>338</sup> David G. Dalin. *The Myth of Hitler's Pope*. p. 77.

Furthermore, the spiritual state of those involved is not actually at issue. The critics of Pius XII are not troubled by the question of excommunication out of concern for Nazi souls, but rather because a blanket excommunication of all Nazis - like the one Pius XII issued in 1949 excommunicating all communists and all Catholics working with communists<sup>339</sup> –even if completely theologically meaningless, would have sent a message that the slaughter of Jews was an offence to Catholic principles and was thus incompatible with Catholicism.

Furthermore, the argument from automatic apostasy is also rendered awkward by the contention of some critics that, although the collaborating Catholics may have already brought mandatory excommunication upon themselves, they didn't seem to realize it. In some areas, for example Slovakia under the rule of the priest president Monsignor Jozef Tiso, the eliminationist ambitions of the Nazis were embraced with positively religious zeal. Goldhagen notes, for example, that President Tiso explicitly invoked the Church's authority to sanction the mass murder of Jews, while the Catholic clergy in the Slovak Parliament all voted in favour of the deportation of the Jews to their deaths. Against these facts, Goldhagen argues that the Church's refusal to publicly and emphatically disassociate itself from Tiso and the other priests who:

... contributed to and gave their blessings to deportation and mass murder, and by refusing to excommunicate this man and the others acting publicly in the name of the Church, Pius XII and his bishops showed that they believed that people complicit in the mass murder of Jews were worthy of representing this Catholic Church in its most sacred duties.<sup>340</sup>

Nor does Goldhagen appear to be overstating the case, at least in regards to the eliminationist zeal of the Slovakian government. Even Adolf Eichmann seems to have been slightly shocked by the eager complicity of the Catholic clergy-dominated Slovakian Government, observing after the war that the "... Slovakian officials offered their Jews to us like someone throwing away sour beer."<sup>341</sup> In this context, it does seem difficult to disagree with the notion that a program of excommunications may well have served, not just as a moral vindication of the church, but to dissuade some Catholics from collaboration, or at least diminished the authority and thus the mobilizing power of Tiso and his like.

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<sup>339</sup> José Mariano Sánchez. *Pius XII and the Holocaust: Understanding the Controversy*. p. 21.

<sup>340</sup> Daniel Jonah Goldhagen. *A Moral Reckoning: The Role of the Catholic Church in the Holocaust and Its Unfulfilled Duty of Repair*. p. 66

<sup>341</sup> Liva Rotkirkchen. *"The Destruction of Slovak Jewry: A Documentary History."* p. xx-xxi

The counter-argument to this counter-charge is that, Hitler being a murderous maniac might have retaliated violently to any provocation by the Pope, such as a program of excommunications. Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this argument is found in the February 1999 issue of *Inside the Vatican*,<sup>342</sup> a magazine describing itself as “the world’s most well-informed, comprehensive monthly Catholic news magazine” which published an article in defence of Pius XII by Miriam Zolli, the daughter of former chief Orthodox Rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli. This article managed, in its defence of the Vatican, to be more damning than the condemnation of the most ardently anti-clerical critics. Zolli writes, for example that:

Pacelli and my father were tragic figures in a world where every moral reference point had been lost. An abyss of evil had opened up, but ordinary people did not believe it ... Pius XII had understood that Hitler would not descend to pacts with anyone, that his madness was of the type that could explode in any direction, in the massacre of German Catholics or in the bombing of Rome, and he acted in the light of this knowledge. The Pope was like a person constrained to move in solitude among the lunatics of an insane asylum. He did what he could. His silence must be read in that context, as an act of prudence, not of cowardice.<sup>343</sup>

The first problem with this argument is that the claim that the Pope acted prudently, and out of fear that Hitler may have turned on the Catholics of Europe is, on one level, deeply offensive to anyone who isn’t Catholic. The moral persuasiveness of the argument rests on accepting that the lives of the counter-factual Catholics who may have been endangered by action, are more important than the lives of actual Jews, gypsies, communists, Jehovah's Witnesses and homosexuals who were killed as the

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<sup>342</sup> In many ways publication of an article by Zolli in defence of the Vatican, is in itself an act of wanton insensitivity, as her father, Israel Zolli is still a remarkably divisive figure owing to the fact that when the Nazis ceased control of Rome, Israel Zolli, used his influence to flee along with his family into the Vatican, which was seen by many in the Jewish community to be a cowardly betrayal and abject abandonment of his people. (John Cornwell, *Hitler’s Pope* p. 301). Nor is this an issue from the long dead past, owing largely to the Catholic church’s continued use of Zolli as both a prized convert and evidence of Pius XII’s benevolence to the Jews of Italy. Zolli is, in many ways, as contentious a character now as he was 60 years ago. The *Encyclopedia Judaica*, for example, dismisses Zolli as one “... who had abandoned his flock during the war to find a haven in the Vatican” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition, Volume 17. p.416) and later adumbrates this, writing that: “At the beginning of September 1943, when the Germans entered Rome, he abandoned the community and took refuge in the Vatican. At the end of the hostilities, he reappeared to assume his position as rabbi, but was rejected by the community because of his unworthy behaviour at the time of the greatest danger.” (*Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Second Edition, Volume 21, p.666). Likewise the website outreachjudaism.org, which bills itself as “Judaism’s response to Christian missionaries” (@<http://www.outreachjudaism.org>) writes that: Rabbi Israel Zolli’s apostasy to Catholicism had little to do with any spiritual conviction ... Rather, it was the result of his ostracism and banishment after the Holocaust by the survivors of the Italian Jewish community, whom he callously abandoned during the war when he hid in the Vatican while fleeing the Nazis.” (“Why Did the Chief Rabbi of Rome Convert to Catholicism?” @ <http://www.outreachjudaism.org/rome.html>)

<sup>343</sup> Miriam Zolli. “My Father Never Stopped Being A Jew: A conversation with Miriam Zolli, daughter of the former Chief Rabbi of Rome, Israel Zolli.” Originally published in *Inside the Vatican*, February 1999, reprinted at Pope Pius XII and the Nazis @ [http://piusxii.hismercy.ca/rabbi's\\_daughterx.html](http://piusxii.hismercy.ca/rabbi's_daughterx.html)

result of inaction. As such, the argument carries within it, the unspoken and implicit contention that the lives of Catholics are more important than those of non-believers.

However, the far more destructive element is that such claims are diametrically opposed to the claims the pontiff and the Vatican make of and for themselves. To claim that Pius XII cannot be blamed for his inaction because “every moral reference point had been lost” is either not true, as the Bible and two thousand years of canon law and church teaching had not simply disappeared, or is an admission that, in fact, these attributes possess no special moral knowledge or authority, and that morality, in fact, comes from the outside world. As such, in two relatively easy steps, the Church’s apologists have been forced through the need to defend the authority of the Papacy, to admit that the charges are true, and to fundamentally gut the very authority they were trying to defend. They also managed to make themselves look insensibly insensitive as they did so.

***Reconciling the Natural and the Divine: Troeltsch’s distinction in action.***

However, in many ways, as overheated and aggressive as this argument has become, with Pius XII’s defenders at times, seeming cynical, dishonest and chauvinistically smug, while his critics are all too often so caught up in their outrage as to forget that there were and are, in a geopolitical sense at least, limits to the Vatican’s power, the important point to note here is that it is still an actual debate. In marked contrast to the evolution debate discussed earlier, no one is making up their own facts. No one is claiming that Pius XII did not sign a concordat with Hitler, or that there was, in fact, a major program of excommunications directed at Nazis. Nor on the other side, is anyone claiming that Pius XII was personally involved in the formulation of the Final Solution. Nor does anyone doubt or deny that Pius was influenced by the thought of what would happen to Catholicism had he taken a public stand against Nazism, only to find when the war was over that Europe was a Nazi Empire, or even a continent divided between Hitler and Stalin. In fact, this is the sole source of contention, namely whether the Vatican’s first priority should be to the commission of Christ and the existence of the Catholic Church, or being a moral exemplar and guardian for all mankind, and whether these roles are in fact divisible.

Whatever the final outcome of the debate, whether it ends with Pius XII becoming a saint, or with the Vatican issuing an apology for his behaviour in the years preceding and during the war, it is a good deal less important than the fact that the Vatican is still, in its own way, in dialogue with its critics and the outside world. However self-defeating it may be, in its defence of Pius XII, the Vatican is trying to find some middle ground that will preserve both its authority and historical righteousness while still allowing for a controlled and gradual compromise with demands placed on it by moral evolution and the passing of the years. Thus the Vatican is, to return to Troeltsch's distinction, attempting to reconcile the natural law and divine law.<sup>344</sup>

In contrast, the fundamentalist response to Christianity's complicity in the Holocaust, has, again in keeping with Troeltsch's distinction, been simply to pile myth upon myth, claiming that there was no complicity, and that in fact the Nazis had been atheist socialists and the Holocaust had been an attempt to destroy all religion, which had only been directed against Jews as a prelude to the final eradication of Christianity. To some degree, this seems to have been a result of American propaganda during the war. One of the most notable examples of this argument is the book *I was in Hell with Niemoeller*, originally published with a foreword by Norman Vincent Peale in 1942.<sup>345</sup> The book claimed to be an account of one Leo Stein, who had been imprisoned with Niemöller in Moabit and Sachsenhausen, where for some, never fully explained reason, Stein and Niemöller suffered through regular meetings with Hitler himself, in which Hitler outlined, in conveniently candid terms, his goal of destroying Christianity. The book was, in the words of Niemöller biographer James Bentley, a "... complete fabrication..."<sup>346</sup> and was revealed as such at the time by the journal *Christian Century*.<sup>347</sup> However the book's fraudulence was considered less important than its motivational power, and it was largely tolerated as a useful lie.

The book fell into obscurity after the war, owing to Niemöller's rather troublesome refusal to become a Christian martyr, and his even more problematic refusal to be quite the ardent anti-communist, the book had claimed him to be, most notable in his

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<sup>344</sup> Hans G. Kippenburg. "Religious History, Displaced By Modernity". *Numen: International Review of the History of Religion*, Vol.XLVII, No.3 2000. p. 228.

<sup>345</sup> Leo Stein. *I Was in Hell With Niemoeller*. Note: American spelling of name differs from German spelling.

<sup>346</sup> James Bentley. *Martin Niemöller*. p. 153

<sup>347</sup> Ibid.



opposition to the Vietnam war and his 1966 meeting with, and subsequent praise of Ho Chi Minh.<sup>348</sup> However in 2003, with Niemöller safely dead and his more ambiguous actions and beliefs forgotten, Stein's book was republished, this time under the title *Hitler Came for Niemoeller: The Nazi War Against Religion*, which added to the already fallacious story the claim that Nazism was simply an aggressive form of the godless and aggressively atheistic socialism that had emerged with the French Revolution and whose tide had not been turned until "... Ronald Reagan freed Granada in 1982".<sup>349</sup>

***Demanding Myth and Unstable Paradox: Ideology becomes idolatry.***

While this is precisely the kind of behaviour Troeltsch's distinction predicts, it also marks the point at which myth becomes unstable and to a degree dangerous.

As discussed earlier, Troeltsch provides an insight into the process of recasting religion into Eliadian myth and thence into immutable reality. However, the further the myth moves from what is generally regarded as true, the more demanding it becomes. As the myth begins to crack, more and more new myths become necessary to shore up the central myth, thus moving the myth ever further from the generally accepted truth. This process in and of itself becomes a unstable paradox, with such myths becoming self-limiting as, by effectively cutting the fundamentalist off from the rest of the world, it denies any mechanism for, and any intellectual capacity, to enable change. However, no rejection of the ways and shape of the world, no act of faith or will can remove a person from the human species and the human species can never be removed from our ever-changing moral universe.

In many ways this notion of unending change has been the signal lesson of modernity. It spans Darwin's dangerous idea that the natural world is in a continuous state of flux. It reveals through Edwin Hubble that the universe is spreading out in every direction and as it expands, it - like a wave washing onto a shore - leaves behind spinning eddies of gas, dust and heavy elements which collapse into solar systems and galaxies. It gives us Einstein's mind-rending discovery that energy and matter are fundamentally the same thing, just in temporarily different forms. It develops atomic theory and the discovery that everything is made of atoms, and that these atoms are

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<sup>348</sup> James Bentley. *Martin Niemöller*. pp. 224-226.

<sup>349</sup> Leo Stein. *Hitler Came for Niemoeller: The Nazi War Against Religion*. pp.12.

being constantly and infinitely reshuffled. As pattern-seeking primates with brains thrown up as a result of this constant rearranging, this is as true for us and our inner worlds, as for anything and everything else. This is what, to return to the earlier discussion about evolution, separates creationism from natural theology.

For William Paley, writing before Darwin, or Lamarck, the lack of any plausible mechanism by which organisms could adapt to their environment, necessitated the conclusion that the marked cohesion between the characteristics of organisms and the demands of their environment was the result of the environment having been fitted to the needs of the organisms.<sup>350</sup> Thus came the twin ideas of a clockwork universe with a place for everything and everything in its place, and the idea that we could learn about the creator by studying the creation.<sup>351</sup> Now however, modern admirers of Paley are not operating without a plausible mechanism, but are rather operating out of the rejection of that plausible mechanism. Thus the locus of piety is no longer on the creation or the creator but rather on the rejection itself and the person doing the rejecting. Thus the consequence become clear.

The fundamentalist is not, in fact, a partisan on behalf of his or her myth, but is, rather, the main character in their own myth about their partisanship. Thus the fundamentalist usurps God's role as hero, reducing God, in many ways, to a simple cipher and symbol for the unquestionable good for which the hero of the piece is fighting. As such, God becomes utterly mutable, and to a large degree, a syncretic nationality, not a law-giving authority whose very word is the heart and soul of morality and righteousness, but simply a repository for all that is seen as moral and righteous. Thus, to some degree the celebration of unquestioning submission to God, is in many ways a calculated and theatrical fetishization of submission to sanctify the in-group, and a self deifying elevation of the in group to the status of idol.

### ***Morality Dumbfounded.***

However, this in itself produces tectonic tensions, since as we have seen, the structure and content of morality and ethical thinking, change and evolve. Paradoxically, ideas

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<sup>350</sup> William Paley, James Paxton, John Ware. *Natural Theology; Evidences of the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*. pp.31-32.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid p. 295.

of righteousness and morality are themselves often products of mythico-historical world-making, and thus deeply rooted in tradition. This is the eternal problem of the traditionalist and the authoritarian. The only constant is change, and this change will always be reflected, to some degree, in the individuals that make up the group. Thus all traditions and every authority will eventually become redundant and irrelevant, and once irrelevant, can only redeem themselves by internalising and recreating themselves to reflect the change in the times, which in itself is an offence to tradition. As such, it is all too easy to see how this becomes an intractable double-bind and produces a state which Haidt calls being “moral dumbfoundedness”<sup>352</sup> meaning the total disconnect between moral intuitions and thought-based moral judgements, or more literally, the certain knowledge that something is wrong or right but an inability to say why.<sup>353</sup>

Thusly, the fundamentalist’s myth-world becomes the anodyne for the strain, if not downright injury to mental processes it itself has caused, as by mythologising the real world as an unreal background, as set-dressing for the hyper-real heroism of the righteous, the moral demands of the world are erased at a stroke, as whatever moral position the faithful choose automatically becomes the right one. When the movement does cast off its past and accept the normative of changing morals, as the Southern Baptist Convention did in 1995, renouncing racism and expressing regret for its traditional defence of slavery and segregation,<sup>354</sup> the capitulation to moral evolution, became the faithful coming that much closer to God by casting out an evil from within their midst. Alternately, when fundamentalists refuse to be moved by changing standards, as with the Southern Baptist Convention’s current stand on the issue of homosexuality, then their intransigence becomes a heroic stand for virtue and an unwavering loyalty and faithfulness to God in the face of permissive and immoral times.

This remarkable moral flexibility is, to a large degree, hidden in plain sight. Because fundamentalists so often, and so loudly proclaim their own absolute morality and

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<sup>352</sup> Jonathan Haidt. “The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology.” *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. No. 5827. p. 998.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid.

<sup>354</sup> Robert J. Priest and Alvaro L. Nieves (eds). *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*. p. 275 and 339.

present themselves as fighting against the loss of moral reference points, it has often been assumed that they are taking a stand, un-nuanced and problematic as it may be, against the creeping dark of nihilism and a loss of meaning. However, it becomes more and more arguable that, in a very real sense, fundamentalists are nihilists, and are taking a stand against meaning.

Of course, such a claim is rendered problematic both in the sense that the term nihilism first emerged during and after the French revolution as an epithet hurled by the religious at the revolutionaries.<sup>355</sup> Furthermore, such a claim, of course, seems paradoxical, since fundamentalists do clearly believe passionately in a vast number of things. However, any discussion of nihilism will, in the end, focus on statements about the perceived meaninglessness of life. As Meerten B. ter Borg puts it “In its broadest connotation, to say that one is nihilistic is to say that one has no authentic values, no real ends, that one's whole existence is pure nothingness.”<sup>356</sup>

Taking this definition, the construction of, and overarching obsession with a hyper-real mythical world to the exclusion of the actual world becomes a rarified form of nihilism. If this world is simply a fallen and sinful plane that exists only to be transcended, if the incalculable suffering of the world is simply the result of sin, which itself exists in order that it might be overcome, if righteousness is a disregard for the needs of the flesh, if life is simply a game in which salvation can be won, then fundamentalism is not only by definition nihilistic, but is in fact the *reductio ad absurdum* of nihilism: nihilism that has become dogmatic and itself a kind of belief.

Of course, one could argue that given the near universal privileging of soul over flesh, all religions are, to some degree nihilistic, and that as such, such an observation is an inditement of religion generally, rather than fundamentalism in particular. However, here again we run into the problem of moral evolution. The clearest instance both of fundamentalist nihilism and its discount from what may be called mainstream piety comes on the question of morality. The fundamentalist view of morality, when expressed candidly, often seems to mean nothing but the willing, eager, pragmatic

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<sup>355</sup> Meerten B. ter Borg. “The Problem of Nihilism: A Sociological Approach.” *Sociological Analysis*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Spring, 1988). p. 1.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. p. 2.

abeyance to power. New Zealand's own expatriate fundamentalist author Ray Comfort, for example, in answering the question as to why God, being morally perfect, could have spent so much of the Old Testament ordering rape, genocide and slavery, replies that:

If you think that was bad, how about the fact that God has proclaimed a death sentence upon every man, woman and child? It gets worse. Eternal Damnation in a terrible place called hell awaits everyone who has done evil. Everyone. The day will come when absolute justice will be done. That's wonderful news ... if you're not a criminal in God's eyes. And if His judgment upsets you, here's a verse to think about: 'All of God's judgments are righteous and true altogether.' I trust Him and I am not at all offended by anything He does.<sup>357</sup>

While Comfort apparently feels that he possess the only true understanding of God, he is at a massive and marked variance with the vast majority of American Christians. According to a Pew survey conducted in December of 2008, only 29% of those surveyed thought that their faith was the only one that could or would lead to salvation, while 65% held that many faiths can lead to salvation. Perhaps more surprisingly, 29% held that salvation was purely a matter of being a good person and had nothing to do with what one believed.<sup>358</sup>

This, in the end, is the point. Notwithstanding the constant conflation of religion with morality and the idea that the modern world is soulless and wicked and uncaring, the truth is, as Haidt puts, in spite of the fact that people are essentially self-interested:

... people do sincerely want peace, decency, and cooperation to prevail within their groups. And because morality may be as much a product of cultural evolution as genetic evolution, it can change substantially in a generation or two. For example, as technological advances make us more aware of the fate of people in faraway lands, our concerns expand and we increasingly want peace, decency, and cooperation to prevail in other groups, and in the human group as well.<sup>359</sup>

Thus the question is not how we can be moral without God, as everything we appear to know about the evolution of the moral mind seems to suggest there were morals before there were men and that we couldn't stop being moral if we tried. Rather the question is to what degree is absolute fundamentalist faith a palliative to the moral demands of being human.

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<sup>357</sup> Ray Comfort. *You Can Lead an Atheist to Evidence, But You Can't Make Him Think: Answers to Questions from Angry Skeptics*. p. 212.

<sup>358</sup> "Many Americans Say Other Faiths Can Lead to Eternal Life" <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=380>

<sup>359</sup> Jonathan Haidt. "The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology." *Science*. 18 May 2007: Vol. 316. no. 5827. p. 1001.

## Conclusion:

Of course this does seem massively paradoxical, but paradoxical is not the same as untrue. Most of the tangled mass of competing traits which make up the human condition, are best expressed in paradox. We are probably the cleverest creatures that will ever walk the globe, and yet we are also capable of unfathomable stupidity. We appear to have a much more developed sense of morality than any other animal, and yet we are capable of the direst cruelty, and so on. What is often not considered is what an immense pressure it is to live with such ubiquitous cognitive dissonance. We now appear far enough evolved to at least begin to attempt to understand why this cognitive dissonance should be so.

The debate about the human condition still seems caught up in Disraeli's dichotomy of humans as either angels or apes. However, once we accept that we are both, that is, that we are apes attempting to be angels, suddenly the paradox makes sense.

We are indeed creatures motivated by morality, but with the proviso that this morality evolved to enable us to live in groups of a few dozen, most of them close kin. When placed in the context of a larger, more-peopled world, this morality is often found wanting. Once it is understood that racism and related forms of "othering" are vestigial habits of thought from the days when everyone we could ever meet was either closely related, or at least very familiar, we are empowered to rebel against such impulses.

Although some will claim that the possibility of rebelling against our nature is simply a new kind of humanist metaphysics,<sup>360</sup> our ability to do so is undeniable. As Darwin noted, the fact that we feel so compelled to help the helpless, that we will do so even to the detriment of our genetic best interests, is the noblest part of our nature.<sup>361</sup>

However it is a painful gift, as the reward for being moral is the knowledge that we are not, and never will be, moral enough. Every moral step in our moral evolution reveals heretofore unimagined levels on which we will be found wanting. This often leads to the feeling that all hope of moral improvement is impossible. Furthermore, as the idea of what we should be, moves ever farther away from what we actually are, it

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<sup>360</sup> Karen Armstrong, *History of God*. p. 2. See also John Gray, *Black Mass*. p.180.

<sup>361</sup> Charles Darwin, Adrian Desmond, James Moore. *The Descent of Man: and Selection in Relation to Sex*. p.159.

is traitorously easy to imagine that we are getting worse.<sup>362</sup>

In his attempt to disprove the reality of moral evolution, John Gray cites the speed with which we have returned to torture as an acceptable tool of war and government in the so called 'war on terror', and uses this supposition to argue that, in terms of morality, what is gained, can be lost "... in the blink of an eye."<sup>363</sup>

However, in actuality, torture has not returned, simply because it never went away. In the mid to late 1970's, the British police, responding to national outrage over IRA bombings, launched a campaign of torture, coercion and judicial corruption that saw Amnesty International declare the United Kingdom as the worst human rights violators in Western Europe, a title it would hold until 1992.<sup>364</sup> What is all the more shocking, is that the torture was not motivated by the idea that it might prevent future attacks, but simply to satisfy an aggrieved public hungry for convictions, and was often used to obtain confessions from people who had not, and in some cases could not, have had any involvement in the crimes.

Gerry Conlon, one of the so-called Guildford Four, was beaten, tortured and finally told that if he didn't sign a confession, the British army would kill his mother and sister, despite police awareness that he had been in London on the night of the Guildford bombing, a fact that the court purposely kept from the defense.<sup>365</sup> Another, more famous example of the use of torture was with 'The Birmingham Six', who were arrested largely for being Irish, were beaten before questioning, then tortured until they signed confessions and then beaten again by the prison warders to account for their injuries.<sup>366</sup> The judge in the case, The Right Honorable Lord Denning, even went so far as to rule evidence inadmissible that the confessions were extracted under torture, since that would mean that the Six would have to be acquitted.<sup>367</sup> Nor does it seem that this is viewed as a particularly unethical legal action or even as an

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<sup>362</sup> John Gray. *Black Mass*.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. p. 188

<sup>364</sup> Tim Pat Coogan. *The Troubles: Ireland's Ordeal 1966-1996 and the Search for Peace*. p.290.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid p.191

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Stephen Sedley. "A benchmark of British justice: Alfred Thompson Denning, Lord Denning of Whitechurch, judge, born January 23, 1899; died March 5 1999," *The Guardian* @ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/1999/mar/06/guardianobituaries>

unpleasant but necessary pragmatism. In fact, after the case, Lord Denning declared that: "This case shows what a civilised country we are"<sup>368</sup>

Shameful and despicable as the continued use of torture, both judicial and otherwise, undoubtedly is, it cannot really be held up as an instance of the devolution of human morality, so much as being another example of the human race's imperfect sense of morality. However, the issue of torture also provides a telling example of the nihilistic edge of fundamentalist belief. In April of 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, released a study showing that 62% of White American Evangelicals<sup>369</sup> felt that torture was either often or sometimes justified, as opposed to 49% of the general population, and 40% of those with no religious affiliation.<sup>370</sup> Nor is this an anomalous finding, on issue after issue, we find that fundamentalists are simply less interested in, or perhaps feel less compelled to be morally serious. White Evangelicals are 18% less likely than Catholics, and 20% less likely than the religiously unaffiliated, to consider global warming a serious problem.<sup>371</sup>

Is it not hard to see how fundamentalist thinking could affect such moral judgments, whether in the sense that in the context of a cosmic and Manichean struggle, cruelty is necessary, or simply that this veil of tears will soon pass away and as such, nothing much matters. Nor is it hard to see the motivation. It is a great burden being a moral creature, and is even harder in a world without recourse to authority or tradition. Nor is a morality based purely on harm and fairness, infallible. Many instances of gratuitous cruelty could be claimed as result of an obsession with harm, harm struck by a lack of knowledge. The witch burnings that plagued Europe through the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries for example, would, from a harm-and-fairness point of view, seem justified if witches could in fact rain down death, destruction, crop failure and famine. Consequently, killing an individual for the safety of the village would seem the moral thing to do.

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<sup>368</sup> *Stephen Sedley*. "A benchmark of British justice: Alfred Thompson Denning, Lord Denning of Whitechurch, judge, born January 23, 1899; died March 5 1999," *The Guardian* @ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/1999/mar/06/guardianobituaries>

<sup>369</sup> Of course not all White Evangelicals are fundamentalists, but as Pew notes they are the group most likely to espouse extremely conservative religious views.

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics." @ <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=153>

<sup>370</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*



Furthermore, a concern for harm can often pull in two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive directions. To take a particularly twentieth century example, there can be little doubt that, from the point of view of harm, Dwight D. Eisenhower was absolutely correct when he stated that:

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children ... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.<sup>372</sup>

However, it is equally unquestionable that the horrors of Nazi Germany, the atrocities of the Balkan civil war, and the irreducible shame of the global community's failure to react to the Rwandan genocide, all illustrate that reflexive pacifism is also morally indefensible. Furthermore, to competently judge the morality of any given action strictly on the basis of harm, is often only possible after the fact, as, the only answer is often, the lesser of the available evils. As such, since the degree of evil is impossible to judge beforehand, a morality concerned solely with harm is often left with the choice between a largely uninformed guess, and simple moral paralysis.

The case of the US invasion of Iraq is a peculiarly pertinent here, as, even those who opposed the invasion accepted that price of prolonged containment – usually accepted as the only alternative – was, even if one ignored the predations of the Ba'ath Party, probably somewhere on the order of 10, 000 deaths a year, most of them children dying of malnutrition and preventable sickness as the result of sanctions.<sup>373</sup> On the other hand, the cost of intervention was unavoidable regime change, which meant invasion. Since before the invasion there was no way of knowing what the humanitarian cost of war might be, at least to those not privy to military estimates, the choice was between a monstrous evil and an unknown evil.

In some ways this might also explain why conservative churches are thriving while liberal Churches are to some degree dying on the vine. According to Pew, Progressive Christians are at once more concerned with environmental issues, issues of peace and

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<sup>372</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower. "Cross of Iron Speech" in Robert A. Divine. *Eisenhower and the Cold War*. p.108.

<sup>373</sup> UNICEF. "Questions and Answers for the Iraq child mortality surveys" @ <http://www.casi.org.uk/info/unicef/990816qa.html>

less likely to believe in the literal truth of the Bible, than the general public.<sup>374</sup> This untethered and wide-reaching concern cannot help but add to the already sizable and basic human anxiety to be moral, while at the same time stripping one of any illusion of certainty, thus leaving the believer compelled to act, but unable to know if their actions are right or wrong. Self-reflexive faith, that is faith that engages with the world, the faith that under Troeltsh's distinction would be called simply 'the church', is forever tested by and against the world. However this is not, in the final analyses, a failure of faith, as in a very real sense, the true triumph of faith is found in the prospect, if not promise, of failure. For a community to keep its faith, both the faith *of* the community and the faith *in* the community, in the face of the certain knowledge that nothing is ultimately certain, is the most remarkable faith imaginable.

However the converse is also true, that is to say that in the final analyses, the fundamentalist retreat into nihilism is, in some sense, predicated principally on a failure of faith, and the fear that comes with such a failure. This is to some degree, the unspoken acknowledgment that hangs unsaid over every fundamentalist utterance, the acknowledgement that a rigid adherence to doctrine and dogma is necessary because said dogmas and truths cannot survive unsupported. This, it seems, is what fundamentalism is, the triumph of fear over faith, and the concomitant retreat into easy and comforting, if utterly misguided certainties, to protect a faith that is not strong enough to deal with uncertainty or ambiguity.

With this in mind, the fundamentalist conviction that without God there could be no good or bad, or even any way to imagine a difference, is not, as it may seem, a obscurantist rhetorical trick, but is in fact, a candid, sincere and revealing, if unintentional admission of craven moral terror, of the insurmountable panic that by losing their nihilistic prism, they will find themselves in a deeply imperfect world that they would be obliged to take seriously, and yet could never take seriously enough. As such, it is possibly best to think of fundamentalism more as an existentialist movement than a religious one. In the end, fundamentalism is not fighting the modern world, or the decaying morals of the age, or the armies of the godless, but are fighting

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<sup>374</sup> The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life. "Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics." @ <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=153>

themselves, in fear that if they listen to their inner moral philosopher, they will find themselves alone, with nothing to rely on but their own judgment. As such, it is worth considering the possibility that fundamentalists so often appear monstrous, not because of discordant moral standards, or a failure of interpretation, but actually because fundamentalist have made monsters of themselves and have done so quite consciously, or at least intentionally, in hopes that, as doctor Johnson meant to say “he who makes a monster of himself, might escape the pain of being human.”

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